THE

PENTAMERON

AND

PENTALOGIA.

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THE

PENTAMERON;

OR

INTERVIEWS OF MESSER GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO, AND MESSER FR. PETRARCA,

WHEN SAID MESSER GIOVANNI LAY INFIRM AT HIS VILETTA HARD BY CERTALDO:

AFTER WHICH THEY SAW NOT EACH OTHER ON OUR SIDE OF PARADISE:

SHEWING HOW THEY DISCOURSED UPON THAT FAMOUS THEOLOGIAN,

MESSER DANTE ALIGHIERI,

AND SUNDRY OTHER MATTERS.

EDITED BY PIEVANO D. GRIGI.

THE EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION.

WANTING a bell for my church at San Vivaldo, and hearing that our holy religion is rapidly gaining ground in England, to the unspeakable comfort and refreshment of the Faithful, I bethought myself that I might peradventure obtain such effectual aid, from the piety and liberality of the converts, as well-nigh to accomplish the purchase of one. Desirous moreover of visiting that famous nation, of whose spiritual prosperity we all entertain such animated hopes, now that the clouds of ignorance begin to break and vanish, I resolved that nothing on my part should be wanting to so blessed a consumma-

tion. Therefore, while I am executing my mission in regard to the bell, I omit no opportunity of demonstrating how much happier and peacefuller are we who live in unity, than those who, abandoning the household of Faith, cloathe themselves with shreds and warm themselves with shavings.

Subsidiary to the aid I solicit, I brought with me, and here lay before the public, translated by the best hand I could afford to engage, "*Certain Interviews of Messer Francesco Petrarca and Messer Giovanni Boccaccio*, &c." which the booksellers tell me, should be entitled "The Pentameron," unless I would return with nothing in my pocket. I am ignorant what gave them this idea of my intent, unless it be my deficiency in the language, for certainly I had come to no such resolution. Assurances are made to me by the intelligent and experienced in such merchandise, that the manuscript is honestly worth from twenty-five to thirty francesconi, or dollars. To such a pitch

hath England risen up again, within these few years, after all the expenditure of her protracted war.!

Is there any true Italian, above all, is there any worthy native of Certaldo or San Vivaldo, who revolveth not in his mind what a surprise and delight it will be to Giovanni in Paradise, the first time he hears, instead of that cracked and jarring tumbril, (which must have grated in his ear most grievously ever since its accident, and have often tried his patience,) just such another as he was wont to hear when he rode over to join our townspeople at their *festa?* It will do his heart good, and make him think of old times: and perhaps he may drop a couple of prayers to the Madonna for whoso had a hand in it.

Lest it should be bruited in England or elsewhere, that being in my seventieth year, I have unadvisedly quitted my parish, "*fond of change,*" to use the blessed words of Saint Paul, I am ready to shew the certificate of Monsignore, my

diócesan, approving of my voyage. Monsignore was pleased to think me capable of undertaking it, telling me that I looked hale, spoke without quavering, and, by the blessing of our lady, had nigh upon half my teeth in their sockets, while, pointing to his own and shaking his head, he repeated the celebrated lines of Horatius Flaccus, who lived in the reign of Augustus, a short time before the Incarnation.

> Non ebur, sed horridùm
> Buccâ renidet in meâ lacuna !

Then, turning the discourse from so melancholy a topick, he was pleased to relate from the inexhaustible stores of his archæological acquirements, that no new bell whatever had been consecrated in his diocese of Samminiato since the year of our Lord 1611 : in which year, on the first Sunday of August, a thunderbolt fell into the belfrey of the Duomo, by the negligence of Canonico Malatesta, who, according to history, in his hurry to dine with Conte Geronimo Bardi, at our San Vivaldo, omitted a word

in the mass. While he was playing at bowls after dinner on that Sunday, or, as some will have it, while he was beating Ser. Matteo Filicaia at backgammon, and the younger men and ladies of those two noble families were bird-catching with the *civetta*, it began to thunder: and, within the evening, intelligence of the thunderbolt was brought to the Canonico. On his return, the day following, it was remarked, says the chronicler, that the people took off their caps at the distance of only two or three paces, instead of fifteen or twenty, and few stopped who met him: for the rumour had already gone abroad of his omission. He often rode as usual to Conte Geronimo's, gammoned Ser Matteo, hooded the *civetta*, limed a twig or two, stood behind the spinette, hummed the next note, turned over the pages of the music-book of the *contessine*, beating time on the chair-back, and shewing them what he could do, now and then, on the *viola di gamba*. Only eight years had elapsed when, in the flower of his age,

(for he had scarcely seen sixty,) he was found dead in his bed, after as hearty and convivial a supper as ever Canonico ate. No warning, no *olio santo*, no viaticum, poor man! Candles he had; and it was as much as he had, poor sinner! And this also happened in the month of August! Monsignore, in his great liberality, laid no heavy stress on the coincidence; but merely said,

"Well, Pievano! a mass or two can do him no harm: let us hope he stands in need of few more; but, when you happen to have leisure, and nobody else to think about, prythee clap a wet clout on the fire there below, in behalf of Canonico Malatesta."

I have done it gratis, and I trust he finds the benefit of it. In the same spirit and by the same authority I gird myself for this greater enterprize. Unable to form a satisfactory opinion on the manuscript, I must again refer to my superior. It is the opinion then of Monsignore, that our five dialogues were written down by neither of the interlocutors, but rather by some

intimate, who loved them equally. "For," said Monsignore, "it was the practice of Boccaccio to stand up among his personages, and to take part himself in their discourses. Petrarca, who was fonder of sheer dialogue and had much practice in it, never acquired any dexterity in this species of composition, it being all question and answer, short, snappish, quibbling, and uncomfortable. I speak only of his *Remedies of Adversity and Prosperity*, which indeed leave his wisdom all its wholesomeness, but render it somewhat apt to cleave to the roof of the mouth. The better parts of Homer are in dialogue: and downward from him to Galileo the noblest works of human genius have assumed this form: among the rest I am sorry to find no few heretics and scoffers. At the present day the fashion is over: every man pushes every other man behind him, and will let none speak out but himself."

The *Interviews* took place not within the walls of Certaldo, although within the parish, at

Boccaccio's villa. It should be notified to the curious that about this ancient town, small, deserted, dilapidated as it is, there are several towers and turrets yet standing, one of which belongs to the mansion inhabited in its day by Ser Giovanni. His tomb and effigy are in the church. Nobody has opened the grave to throw light upon his relicks; nobody has painted the marble; nobody has broken off a foot or a finger to do him honor; not even an English name is engraven on the face; although the English hold confessedly the highest rank in this department of literature. In Italy, and particularly in Tuscany, the remains of the illustrious are inviolable; and, among the illustrious, men of genius hold the highest rank. The arts are more potent than curiosity, more authoritative than churchwardens: what Englishman will believe it? Well! let it pass, courteous strangers! you shall find me in future less addicted to the marvellous. At present I have only to lay before you an ancient and (doubt it not) an authentic

account of what passed between my countrymen, Giovanni and Francesco, before they parted for ever. It seemed probable, at this meeting, that Giovanni would have been called away first; for heavy and of long continuance had been his infirmity: but he outlived it three whole years. He could not outlive his friend so many months, but followed him to the tomb before he had worn the glossiness off the cloak Francesco in his will bequeathed to him.

We struggle with Death while we have friends around to cheer us: the moment we miss them we lose all heart for the contest. Pardon my reflection! I ought to have remembered I am not in my stone pulpit, nor at home.

PRETE DOMENICO GRIGI,

Piëvano of San Vivaldo.

London, October 1, 1836.



THE

PENTAMERON.

BOCCACCIO.

WHO is he that entered, and now steps so silently and softly, yet with a foot so heavy it shakes my curtains?

Frate Biagio! can it possibly be you?

No more physic for me, nor masses neither, at present.

Assunta! Assuntina! who is it?

ASSUNTA.*

I cannot say, signor Padrone! he puts his

* I am inclined to believe it must have been Assunta

finger in the dimple of his chin, and smiles to make me bold my tongue.

Nardi, who was probably at this time the only domestic of Ser Giovanni; for we find in the register at Certaldo the marriage of Fiamminga Nardi, daughter of Simplizio Nardi and of Assunta his wife; and, on her tombstone, that "she was erewhile nurse and governess in the house of Ser Giovanni Boccaccio of this parish." What her name was before marriage is uncertain. She left several sons and daughters: one son, the second, was a plumber; and our account-book informs us that on the 14th of March, 1388, six *lire* and three *soldi* were disbursed to him, "for an entirely new tongue, and red pigment thereunto applied, on the dragon at the market-place; likewise for iron bar; likewise for solder round the perforation for keeping the saint (viz. George) upon his horse." His daughter Lisa married Agapeto Camarelli of Colli; which Agapeto rose to be sacristan in that burg; and his great nephew Claudio Neri was sublibrarian in the library of the Duomo at Samminiato. His son-in-law, Simone Mazzuoli, became a most distinguished carpenter, and erected the canopy (still extant) over the episcopal throne in said Duomo. His descendant, in the third degree, was nothing less than page to the

BOCCACCIO.

Fra Biagio! are you come from Samminiato for this? You need not put your finger there. We want no secrets. The girl knows her duty and does her business. I have slept well, and wake better.

(*Raising himself up a little.*)

Why! who are you? It makes my eyes ache to look aslant over the sheets; and I cannot get to sit quite upright so conveniently; and I must not have the window-shutters opener, they tell me.

PETRARCA.

Dear Giovanni! have you then been very unwell?

BOCCACCIO.

O that sweet voice! and this fat friendly hand of thine, Francesco!

Thou hast distilled all the pleasantest flowers,

Cardinal Uberto degli Albizzi. We may augur from the prosperity of Assunta's descendants, that her life was discreet and irreproachable.—D. G.

and all the wholesomest herbs of spring, into my breast already.

What showers we have had this April, ay! How could you come along such roads? If the devil were my labourer, I would make him work upon these of Certaldo. He would have little time and little itch for mischief ere he had finished them, but would gladly fan himself with an Agnus-castus, and go to sleep all through the carnival.

PETRARCA.

Let us cease to talk both of the labour and the labourer. You have then been dangerously ill?

BOCCACCIO.

I do not know: they told me I was: and truly a man might be unwell enough, who has twenty masses said for him, and fain sigh when he thinks what he has paid for them. As I hope to be saved, they cost me a *lira* each. Assunta is a good market-girl in eggs, and mutton, and cow-heel; but I would not allow her

to argue and haggle about the masses. Indeed she knows best whether they were not fairly worth all that was asked for them, although I could have bought a winter cloak for less money. However, we do not want both at the same time. I did not want the cloak: I wanted *them*, it seems. And yet I begin to think God would have had mercy on me, if I had begged it of him myself in my own house. What think you?

PETRARCA.

I think he might.

BOCCACCIO.

Particularly if I offered him the sacrifice on which I wrote to you.

PETRARCA.

That letter has brought me hither.

BOCCACCIO.

You do then insist on my fulfilling my promise, the moment I can leave my bed. I am ready and willing.

PETRARCA.

Promise! none was made. You only told

me that, if it pleased God to restore you to your health again, you are ready to acknowledge his mercy by the holocaust of your Decameron. What proof have you that God would exact it? If you could destroy the *Inferno* of Dante, would you?

BOCCACCIO.

Not I, upon my life! I would not promise to burn a copy of it on the condition of a recovery for twenty years.

PETRARCA.

You are the only author who would not rather demolish another's work than his own; especially if he thought it better: a thought which seldom goes beyond suspicion.

BOCCACCIO.

I am not jealous of any one: I think admiration pleasanter. Moreover, Dante and I did not come forward at the same time, nor take the same walks. His flames are too fierce for you and me: we had trouble enough with milder. I never felt any high gratification in

hearing of people being damned; and much less would I toss them into the fire myself. I might indeed have put a nettle under the nose of the learned judge in Florence, when he banished you and your family; but I hardly think I could have voted for more than a scourging to the foulest and fiercest of the party.

PETRARCA.

Be as compassionate, be as amiably irresolute, toward your own *Novelle*, which have injured no friend of yours, and deserve more affection.

BOCCACCIO.

Francesco! no character I ever knew, ever heard of, or ever feigned, deserves the same affection as you do; the tenderest lover, the truest friend, the firmest patriot, and, rarest of glories! the poet who cherishes another's fame as dearly as his own.

PETRARCA.

If aught of this is true, let it be recorded of me that my exhortations and intreaties have been

successful, in preserving the works of the most imaginative and creative genius that our Italy, or indeed our world, hath in any age beheld.

BOCCACCIO.

I would not destroy his poems, as I told you, or think I told you. Even the worst of the Florentines, who in general keep only one of God's commandments, keep it rigidly in regard to Dante ..

"Love them who curse you."

He called them all scoundrels, with somewhat less courtesy than cordiality, and less afraid of censure for veracity than adulation: he sent their fathers to hell, with no inclination to separate the child and parent; and now they are hugging him for it in his shroud? Would you ever have suspected them of being such lovers of justice?

You must have mistaken my meaning; the thought never entered my head: the idea of destroying a single copy of Dante! And what

effect would that produce? There must be fifty, or near it, in various parts of Italy.

PETRARCA.

I spoke of you.

BOCCACCIO.

Of me! My poetry is vile; I have already thrown into the fire all of it within my reach.

PETRARCA.

Poetry was not the question. We neither of us are such poets as we thought ourselves when we were younger, and as younger men think us still. I meant your Decameron; in which there is more character, more nature, more invention, than either the modern or the ancient Italy, or than Greece, from whom she derived her whole inheritance, ever claimed or ever knew. Would you consume a beautiful meadow because there are reptiles in it; or because a few grubs hereafter may be generated by the succulence of the grass?

BOCCACCIO.

You amaze me: you utterly confound me.

as there is no holy-water-sprinkler in the room: and you are aware that other dangers awaited me, had I been so imprudent as to show the Florentines the allusion of our poet. His *gergo* is perpetually in play, and sometimes plays very roughly.

PETRARCA.

We will talk again of him presently. I must now rejoice with you over the recovery and safety of your prodigal son, the Decameron.

BOCCACCIO.

So then, you would preserve at any rate my favourite volume from the threatened conflagration.

PETRARCA.

Had I lived at the time of Dante, I would have given him the same advice in the same circumstances. Yet how different is the tendency of the two productions! Yours is somewhat too licentious; and young men, in whose nature, or rather in whose education and habits, there is usually this failing, will read you with

more pleasure than is commendable or innocent. Yet the very time they occupy with you, would perhaps be spent in the midst of those excesses or irregularities, to which the moralist, in his uttermost severity, will argue that your pen directs them. Now there are many who are fond of standing on the brink of precipices, and who nevertheless are as cautious as any of falling in. And there are minds desirous of being warmed by description, which, without this warmth, might seek excitement among the things described.

I would not tell you in health what I tell you in convalescence, nor urge you to compose what I dissuade you from cancelling. After this avowal, I do declare to you, Giovanni, that in my opinion, the very idlest of your tales will do the world as much good as evil; not reckoning the pleasure of reading, nor the exercise and recreation of the mind, which in themselves are good. What I reprove you for, is the indecorous and uncleanly; and these, I trust,

you will abolish. Even these, however, may repel from vice the ingenuous and graceful spirit, and can never lead any such toward them. Never have you taken an inhuman pleasure in blunting and fusing the affections at the furnace of the passions; never, in hardening by sour sagacity and ungenial strictures, that delicacy which is more productive of innocence and happiness, more estranged from every track and tendency of their opposites, than what in cold crude systems hath holden the place and dignity of the highest virtue. May you live, O my friend, in the enjoyment of health, to substitute the facetious for the licentious, the simple for the extravagant, the true and characteristic for the indefinite and diffuse.

BOCCACCIO.

I dare not defend myself under the bad example of any: and the bad example of a great man is the worst defence of all. Since however you have mentioned Messer Dante

Alighieri, to whose genius I never thought of approaching, I may perhaps have been formerly the less cautious of offending by my levity, after seeing him display as much or more of it in hell itself.

PETRARCA.

The best apology for Dante, in his poetical character, is presented by the indulgence of criticism, in considering the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* as a string of *satires*, part in narrative and part in action; which renders the title of *Commedia* more applicable. The filthiness of some passages would disgrace the drunkenest horse-dealer; and the names of such criminals are recorded by the poet as would be forgotten by the hangman in six months. I wish I could expatiate rather on his injudiciousness than on his ferocity, in devising punishments for various crimes; or rather, than on his malignity in composing catalogues of criminals to inflict them on. Among the rest we find a gang of coiners. He calls by name all the

rogues and vagabonds of every city in Tuscany, and curses every city for not sending him more of them. You would fancy that Pisa might have contented him; no such thing. He hoots,

"Ah Pisa! scandal to the people in whose fine country *si* means *yes*, why are thy neighbours slack to punish thee? May Capraia and Gorgona stop up the mouth of the Arno, and drown every soul within thee!"

BOCCACCIO.

None but a prophet is privileged to swear and curse at this rate, and several of those got broken heads for it.

PETRARCA.

It did not happen to Dante, though he once was very near it, in the expedition of the exiles to recover the city. Scarcely had he taken breath after this imprecation against the Pisans, than he asks the Genoese why such a parcel of knaves as themselves were not scattered over the face of the earth.

BOCCACCIO.

Here he is equitable. I wonder he did not incline to one or other of these rival republics.

PETRARCA.

In fact, the Genoese fare a trifle better under him than his neighbours the Pisans do.

BOCCACCIO.

Because they have no Gorgona and Capraia to block them up. He cannot do all he wishes, but he does all he can, considering the means at his disposal. In like manner Messer Gregorio Peruzzi, when he was tormented by the quarrels and conflicts of Messer Gino Ubaldini's trufle-dog at the next door, and Messer Guidone Fantecchi's shop-dog, whose title and quality are in abeyance, swore bitterly, and called the Virgin and Saint Catharine to witness, that he would cut off their tails if ever he caught them. His cook, Niccolo Buonaccorsi, hoping to gratify his master, set baits for them, and captured them both in the kitchen. But unwilling to cast hands prematurely on the de-

linquents, he, after rating them for their animosities and their ravages, bethought himself in what manner he might best conduct his enterprise to a successful issue. He was the rather inclined to due deliberation in these counsels, as they, laying aside their private causes of contention in front of their common enemy, and turning the principal stream of their ill-blood into another channel, agreed in demonstrations which augured no little indocility. Messer Gregorio hath many servants, and moreover all the conveniences which so plenteous a house requires. Among the rest is a long hempen cloth suspended by a roller. Niccolo, in the most favourable juncture, was minded to slip this hempen cloth over the two culprits, whose consciences had made them slink toward the door against which it was fastened. The smell of it was not unsatisfactory to them, and an influx of courage had nearly borne away the worst suspicions. At this instant, while shrewd inquisitiveness and incipient hunger were regaining the

ascendency, Niccolo Buonaccorsi, with all the sagacity and courage, all the promptitude and timeliness of his profession, covered both conspirators in the inextricable folds of the fatal winding-sheet, from which their heads alone emerged. Struggles, and barkings, and exhibitions of teeth, and plunges forward, were equally ineffectual. He continued to twist it about them, until the notes of resentment partook of remonstrance and pain: but he told them plainly he would never remit a jot, unless they became more domesticated and reasonable. In this state of exhaustion and contrition he brought them into the presence of Ser Gregorio, who immediately turned round toward the wall, crossed himself, and whispered an *ave*. At ease and happy as he was at the accomplishment of a desire so long cherished, no sooner had he expressed his piety at so gracious a dispensation, than, reverting to the captor and the captured, he was seized with unspeakable consternation. He discovered at once that he had made as rash a vow as Jephtha's. Alas! one

of the children of captivity, the trufle-dog, had no tail! Fortunately for Messer Gregorio, he found a friend among the White Friars, Frate Geppone Pallorco, who told him that when we cannot do a thing promised by vow, whether we fail by moral inability or by physical, we must do the thing nearest it; "which," said Fra Geppone, "has always been my practise. And now," added this cool considerate white friar, "a dog may have no tail, and yet be a dog to all intents and purposes, and enable a good Christian to perform anything reasonable he promised in his behalf. Whereupon I would advise you, Messer Gregorio, out of the loving zeal I bear toward the whole family of the Peruzzi, to amerce him of that which, if not tail, is next to tail. Such function, I doubt not, will satisfactorily show the blessed Virgin, and Saint Catharine, your readiness and solicitude to perform the vow solemnly made before those two adorable ladies, your protectresses and witnesses."

Ser Gregorio bent his knee at first hearing

their names, again at the mention of them in this relationship toward him, called for the kitchen knife, and, in absolving his promise, had lighter things to deal with than Gorgona and Capraia.

PETRARCA.

Giovanni! this will do instead of one among the worst of the hundred: but with little expenditure of labour you may afford us a better.

Our great fellow-citizen, if indeed we may denominate him a citizen who would have left no city standing in Italy, and less willingly his native one, places in the mouth of the devil, together with Judas Iscariot, the defenders of their country, and the best men in it, Brutus and Cassius. Certainly his feeling of patriotism was different from theirs.

I should be sorry to imagine that it subjected him to any harder mouth or worse company than his own, although in a spirit so contrary to that of the two Romans, he threatened us Flo-

rentines with the sword of Germans. The two Romans, now in the mouth of the devil, chose rather to lose their lives than to see their country, not under the government of invaders, but of magistrates from their own city placed irregularly over them; and the laws, not subverted, but administered unconstitutionally. That Frenchmen and Austrians should argue and think in this manner, is no wonder, no inconsistency: that a Florentine, the wisest and greatest of Florentines, should have done it, is portentous.

How merciful is the Almighty, O Giovanni! What an argument is here! how much stronger and more convincing than philosophers could devise or than poets could utter, unless from inspiration, against the placing of power in the hands of one man only, when the highest genius at that time in the world, or perhaps at any time, betrays a disposition to employ it with such a licentiousness of inhumanity.

BOCCACCIO.

He treats Nero with greater civility: yet Brutus and Cassius, at worst, but slew an atheist, while the other rogue flamed forth like the pestilential dogstar, and burnt up the first crop of Christians to light the ruins of Rome. And the artist of these ruins thought no more of his operation than a scene-painter would have done at the theatre.

PETRARCA.

Historians have related that Rome was consumed by Nero for the purpose of suppressing the rising sect, by laying all the blame on it. Do you think he cared what sect fell or what sect rose? Was he a zealot in religion of any kind? I am sorry to see a lying spirit the most prevalent one, in some among the earliest and firmest holders of that religion which is founded on truth and singleness of intention. There are pious men who believe they are rendering a service to God by bearing false witness in his favour, and who call on the father of lies to hold

up his light before the Sun of righteousness.

We may mistake the exact day when the conflagration began: certain it is, however, that it was in summer:* and it is presumable that the commencement of the persecution was in winter, since Juvenal represents the persecuted as serving for lamps in the streets. Now as the Romans did not frequent the theatres, nor other places of public entertainment, by night, such conveniences were uncalled for in summer, a season when the people retired to rest betimes, from the same motive as at present, the insalubrity of the evening air in the hot weather. Nero must have been very forbearing if he waited those many months before he punished a gang of incendiaries. Such clemency is unexampled in milder princes.

BOCCACCIO.

But the Christians were not incendiaries, and he knew they were not.

* Des Vignolles has calculated that the conflagration began on the 19th of July, in the year 64, and the persecution on the 15th of November.

PETRARCA.

It may be apprehended that, among the many virtuous of the new believers, a few seditious were also to be found, forming separate and secret associations, choosing generals or superiors to whom they swore implicit obedience, and under whose guidance or impulse they were ready to resist, and occasionally to attack, the magistrates, and even the prince; men aspiring to rule the state by carrying the sword of assassination under the garb of holiness. Such persons are equally odious to the unenlightened and the enlightened, to the arbitrary and the free. In the regular course of justice, their crimes would have been resisted by almost as much severity, as they appear to have undergone from despotic power and popular indignation.

BOCCACCIO.

We will talk no longer about these people. But since the devil has really and *buonâ fide* Brutus and Cassius in his mouth, I would advise him to make the most of them, for he will

never find two more such morsels on the same platter. Kings, emperors, and popes, would be happy to partake with him of so delicate and choice a repast: but I hope he has fitter fare for them.

Messer Dante Alighieri does not indeed make the most gentle use of the company he has about him in hell and purgatory. Since, however, he hath such a selection of them, I wish he could have been contented, and could have left our fair Florentines to their own fancies in their dressing-rooms.

"The time," he cries, "is not far distant, when there will be an indictment on parchment, forbidding the impudent young Florentines to shew their breasts and nipples."

Now, Francesco, I have been subject all my life to a strange distemper in the eyes, which no oculist can cure, and which, while it allows me to peruse the smallest character in the very worst female hand, would never let me read an indictment on parchment where female names

are implicated, although the letters were a finger in length. I do believe the same distemper was very prevalent in the time of Messer Dante; and those Florentine maids and matrons who were not afflicted by it, were too modest to look at letters and signatures stuck against the walls.

He goes on, "Was there ever girl among the Moors or Saracens, on whom it was requisite to inflict spiritual or *other* discipline to make her go covered?"

Some of the *other* discipline, which the spiritual guides were, and are still, in the habit of administering, have exactly the contrary effect to make them go covered, whatsoever may be urged by the confessor.

"If the shameless creatures," he continues, "were aware of the speedy chastisement which Heaven is preparing for them, they would at this instant have their mouths wide open to roar withal."

PETRARCA.

This is not very exquisite satire, nor much better manners.

BOCCACCIO.

Whenever I saw a pretty Florentine in such a condition, I lowered my eyes.

PETRARCA.

I am glad to hear it.

BOCCACCIO.

Those whom I could venture to cover, I covered with all my heart.

PETRARCA.

Humanely done. You might likewise have added some gentle admonition.

BOCCACCIO.

They would have taken anything at my hands rather than that. Truly they thought themselves as wise as they thought me: and who knows but they were, at bottom?

PETRARCA.

I believe it may, in general, be best to leave them as we find them.

BOCCACCIO.

I would not say that, neither. Much may be in vain, but something sticks.

PETRARCA.

They are more amused than settled by anything we can advance against them, and are apt to make light of the gravest. It is only the hour of reflection that is at last the hour of sedateness and improvement.

BOCCACCIO.

Where is the bell that strikes it?

PETRARCA.

Fie! fie! Giovanni! This is worse than the indictment on parchment.

BOCCACCIO.

Women like us none the less for joking with them about their foibles. In fact, they take it ill when we cease to do so, unless it is age that compels us. We may give our courser the rein to any extent, while he runs in the common field and does not paw against privacy, nor open his nostrils on individuality. I mean the individu-

ality of the person we converse with, for another's is pure zest.

PETRARCA.

Surely you cannot draw this hideous picture from your own observation: has any graver man noted it?

BOCCACCIO.

Who would believe your graver men upon such matters? Gout and gravel, bile and sciatica, are the upholsterers that stuff their moral sentences. Crooked and cramp are truths written with chalkstones. When people like me talk as I have been talking, they may be credited. We have no ill-will, no ill-humour, to gratify; and vanity has no trial here at issue. He was certainly born on an unlucky day for his friends who never uttered any truths but unquestionable ones. Give me food that exercises my teeth and tongue, and ideas that exercise my imagination and discernment.

PETRARCA.

When you are at leisure, and in perfect health,

weed out carefully the few places of your Decameron which are deficient in these qualities.

BOCCACCIO.

God willing; I wish I had undertaken it when my heart was lighter. Is there anything else you can suggest for its improvement, in particular or in general?

PETRARCA.

Already we have mentioned the inconsiderate and indecorous. In what you may substitute hereafter, I would say to you, as I have said to myself, do not be on all occasions too ceremonious in the structure of your sentences.

BOCCACCIO.

You would surely wish me to be round and polished. Why do you smile?

PETRARCA.

I am afraid these qualities are often of as little advantage in composition as they are corporeally. When action and strength are chiefly the requisites, we may perhaps be better with little of them. The modulations of voice and

language are infinite. Cicero has practised many of them, but Cicero has his favourite swells, his favourite flourishes and cadences. Our italian language is in the enjoyment of an ampler scope and compass; and we are liberated from the horrible sounds of *us*, *am*, *um*, *ant*, *int*, *unt*, so predominant in the finals of latin nouns and verbs. We may be told that they give strength to the dialect: we might as well be told that bristles give strength to the boar. In our italian we possess the privilege of striking off the final vowel from the greater part of masculine nouns, and from the greater part of tenses in the verbs, when we believe they impede our activity and vigour.

BOCCACCIO.

We are as wealthy in words as is good for us; and she who gave us these, would give us more if needful. In another age it is probable that curtailments will rather be made than additions; for it was so with the latin and greek. Barbaric luxury sinks down into civic neat-

ness, and chaster ornaments fill rooms of smaller dimensions.

PETRARCA.

Cicero came into possession of the stores collected by Plautus, which he always held very justly in the highest estimation; and Sallust is reported to have misapplied a part of them. At his death they were scattered and lost.

BOCCACCIO.

I am wiser than I was when I studied the noble orator, and wiser by his means chiefly. In return for his benefits, if we could speak on equal terms together, the novelist with the philosopher, the citizen of Certaldo with the Roman consul, I would fain whisper in his ear, "Escape from rhetoric by all manner of means: and if you must cleave (as indeed you must) to that old shrew, Logic, be no fonder of exhibiting her than you would be of a plain economical wife. Let her be always busy, never intrusive, and readier to keep the chambers clean and orderly

than to expatiate on their proportions or to display their furniture."

PETRARCA.

The citizen of Certaldo is fiftyfold more richly endowed with genius than the Roman consul, and might properly . . .

BOCCACCIO.

Stay! stay! Francesco! or they will shave all the rest of thy crown for thee, and physic thee worse than me.

PETRARCA.

Middling men, favoured in their lifetime by circumstances, often appear of higher stature than belongs to them; great men always of lower. Time, the sovereign, invests with befitting raiment and distinguishes with proper ensigns the familiars he has received into his eternal habitations: in these alone are they deposited: you must wait for them.

No advice is less necessary to you, than the advice to express your meaning as clearly as you can. Where the purpose of glass is to be

seen through, we do not want it tinted nor wavy. In certain kinds of poetry the case may be slightly different: such, for instance, as are intended to display the powers of association and combination in the writer, and to invite and exercise the compass and comprehension of the intelligent. Pindar and the Attic tragedians wrote in this manner, and rendered the minds of their audience more alert and ready and capacious. They found some fit for them, and made others. Great painters have always the same task to perform. What is excellent in their art cannot be thought excellent by many, even of those who reason well on ordinary matters, and see clearly beauties elsewhere. All correct perceptions are the effect of careful practice. We little doubt that a mirrour would direct us in the most familiar of our features, and that our hand would follow its guidance, until we try to cut a lock of our hair. We have no such criterion to demonstrate our liability to error in judging of poetry; a quality so

rare that perhaps no five contemporaries ever were masters of it.

BOCCACCIO.

We admire by tradition; we censure by caprice; and there is nothing in which we are more ingenious and inventive. A wrong step in politics sprains a foot in poetry; eloquence is never so unwelcome as when it issues from a familiar voice; and praise hath no echo but from a certain distance. Our critics, who know little about them, would gaze with wonder at any thing similar, in our days, to Pindar and Sophocles, and would cast it aside, as quite impracticable. They are in the right: for sonnet and canzonet charm greater numbers. There are others, or may be hereafter, to whom far other things will afford far higher gratification.

PETRARCA.

But our business at present is with prose and Cicero; and our question now is, what is Ciceronian. He changed his style according to his matter and his hearers. His speeches to

the people vary from his speeches to the senate. Toward the one he was impetuous and exacting; toward the other he was usually but earnest and anxious, and sometimes but submissive and imploring, yet equally unwilling, on both occasions, to conceal the labour he had taken to captivate their attention and obtain success. At the tribunal of Cæsar the dictator he laid aside his costly armour, contracted the folds of his capacious robe, and became calm, insinuating, and adulative, showing his spirit not utterly extinguished, his dignity not utterly fallen, his consular year not utterly abolished from his memory, but Rome, and even himself, lowered in the presence of his judge.

BOCCACCIO.

And after all this, can you bear to think what I am?

PETRARCA.

Complacently and joyfully; venturing, nevertheless, to offer you a friend's advice.

Enter into the mind and heart of your own

creatures: think of them long, intirely, solely; never of style, never of self, never of critics, cracked or sound. Like the miles of an open country, and of an ignorant population, when they are correctly measured they become smaller. In the loftiest rooms and richest entablatures are suspended the most spider-webs; and the quarry out of which palaces are erected is the nursery of nettle and bramble.

BOCCACCIO.

It is better to keep always in view such writers as Cicero, than to run after those idlers who throw stones that can never reach us.

PETRARCA.

If you copied him to perfection, and on no occasion lost sight of him, you would be an indifferent, not to say a bad writer.

BOCCACCIO.

I begin to think you are in the right. Well then, retrenching some of my licentious tales, I must endeavour to fill up the vacancy with some serious and some pathetic.

PETRARCA.

I am heartily glad to hear of this decision; for, admirable as you are in the jocose, you descend from your natural position when you come to the convivial and the festive. You were placed among the Affections, to move and master them, and gifted with the rod that sweetens the fount of tears. My nature leads me also to the pathetic; in which, however, an imbecil writer may obtain celebrity. Even the hard-hearted are fond of such reading, when they are fond of any; and nothing is easier in the world than to find and accumulate its sufferings. Yet this very profusion and luxuriance of misery is the reason why few have excelled in describing it. The eye wanders over the mass without noticing the peculiarities. To mark them distinctly is the work of genius; a work so rarely performed, that, if time and space may be compared, specimens of it stand at wider distances than the trophies of Sesostris. Here we return again to the *Inferno* of Dante, who

overcame the difficulty. In this vast desart are its greater and its less oasis; Ugolino and Francesca di Rimini. The peopled region is peopled chiefly with monsters and moschitoes: the rest for the most part is sand and suffocation.

BOCCACCIO.

Ah! had Dante remained through life the pure solitary lover of Bice, his soul had been gentler, tranquiler, and more generous. He scarcely hath described half the curses he went through, nor the roads he took on the journey: theology, politics, and that barbican of the Inferno, marriage, surrounded with its

Selva selvaggia ed aspra e forte.

Admirable is indeed the description of Ugolino, to whoever can endure the sight of an old soldier knawing at the scalp of an old archbishop.

PETRARCA.

The thirty lines from

Ed is senti,

are unequalled by any other continuous thirty in the whole dominions of poetry.

BOCCACCIO.

Give me rather the six on Francesca: for if in the former I find the simple, vigorous, clear narration, I find also what I would not wish, the features of Ugolino reflected full in Dante. The two characters are similar in themselves; hard, cruel, inflexible, malignant, but, whenever moved, moved powerfully. In Francesca, with the faculty of divine spirits, he leaves his own nature (not indeed the exact representative of theirs) and converts all his strength into tenderness. The great poet, like the original man of the Platonists, is double, possessing the further advantage of being able to drop one half at his option, and to resume it. Some of the tenderest on paper have no sympathies beyond; and some of the austerest in their intercourse with their fellow-creatures, have deluged the world with tears. It is not from the rose that the

bee gathers her honey, but often from the most acrid and the most bitter leaves and petals.

Quando legemmo il disiato viso
  Esser baciato di cotanto amante,
Questi, chi mai da me non sia diviso!
  La bocca mi baciò tutto tremante...
Galeotto fù il libro, e chi lo scrisse...
  Quel giorno più non vi legemmo avante.

In the midst of her punishment, Francesca, when she comes to the tenderest part of her story, tells it with complacency and delight; and, instead of naming Paolo, which indeed she never has done from the beginning, she now designates him as

Questi chi mai da me non sia diviso!

Are we not impelled to join in her prayer, wishing them happier in their union?

PETRARCA.

If there be no sin in it.

BOCCACCIO.

Ay, and even if there be... God help us!

What a sweet aspiration in each cesura of the verse! three love-sighs fixt and incorporate! Then, when she hath said

La bocca mi baciò, tutto tremante,

she stops: she would avert the eyes of Dante from her: he looks for the sequel: she thinks he looks severely: she says,

"*Galeotto* is the name of the book,"

fancying by this timorous little flight she has drawn him far enough from the nest of her young loves. No, the eagle beak of Dante and his piercing eyes are yet over her.

"*Galeotto* is the name of the book."

"What matters that?"

"And of the writer."

"Or that either?"

At last she disarms him: but how?

"*That* day we redd no more."

Such a depth of intuitive judgement, such a delicacy of perception, exists not in any other work of human genius; and from an author who,

on almost all occasions, in this part of the work, betrays a deplorable want of it.

PETRARCA.

Perfection of poetry! The greater is my wonder at discovering nothing else of the same order or cast in this whole section of the poem. He who fainted at the recital of Francesca,

And he who fell as a dead body falls,

would exterminate all the inhabitants of every town in Italy! What execrations against Florence, Pistoia, Siena, Pisa, Genoa! what hatred against the whole human race! what exultation and merriment at eternal and immitigable sufferings! Seeing this, I cannot but consider the *Inferno* as the most immoral and impious book that ever was written. Yet, hopeless that our country shall ever see again such poetry, and certain that without it our future poets would be more feebly urged forward to excellence, I would have dissuaded Dante from cancelling it, if this had been his intention.

Much however as I admire his vigour and severity of style in the description of Ugolino, I acknowledge with you that I do not discover so much imagination, so much creative power, as in the Francesca. I find indeed a minute detail of probable events: but this is not all I want in a poet; it is not even all I want most in a scene of horror. Tribunals of justice, dens of murderers, wards of hospitals, schools of anatomy, will afford us nearly the same sensations, if we hear them from an accurate observer, a clear reporter, a skilful surgeon, or an attentive nurse. There is nothing of sublimity in the horrific of Dante, which there always is in Eschylus and Homer. If you, Giovanni, had described so nakedly the reception of Guiscardo's heart by Gismonda, or Lorenzo's head by Lisabetta, we could hardly have endured it.

BOCCACCIO.

Prythee, dear Francesco, do not place me over Dante: I stagger at the idea of approaching him.

PETRARCA.

Never think I am placing you blindly or indiscriminately. I have faults to find with you, and even here. Lisabetta should by no means have been represented cutting off the head of her lover, "*as well as she could*" with a clasp-knife. This is shocking and improbable. She might have found it already cut off by her brothers, in order to bury the corpse more commodiously and expeditiously. Nor indeed is it likely that she should have intrusted it to her waiting-maid, who carried it home in her bosom, a treasure so dear to her, and found so unexpectedly and so lately.

BOCCACCIO.

That is true: I will correct the oversight. Why do we never hear of our faults until everybody knows them, and until they stand in record against us?

PETRARCA.

Because our ears are closed to truth and friendship for some time after the triumphal

course of composition. We are too sensitive for the gentlest touch; and when we really have the most infirmity, we are angry to be told that we have any.

BOCCACCIO.

Ah Francesco! thou art poet from scalp to heel: but what other would open his breast as thou hast done! They show ostentatiously far worse weaknesses; but the most honest of the tribe would forswear himself on this. Again, I acknowledge it, you have reason to complain of Lisabetta and Gismonda.

PETRARCA.

They keep the soul from sinking in such dreadful circumstances by the buoyancy of imagination. The sunshine of poetry makes the colour of blood less horrible, and draws up a shadowy and a softening haziness where the scene would otherwise be too distinct. Poems, like rivers, convey to their destination what must without their appliances be left unhandled:

these to ports and arsenals, this to the human heart.

BOCCACCIO.

So it is; and what is terror in poetry is horror in prose. We may be brought too close to an object to leave any room for pleasure. Ugolino affects us like a skeleton, by dry bony verity.

PETRARCA.

We cannot be too distinct in our images; but although distinctness, on this and most other occasions, is desirable in the imitative arts, yet sometimes in painting, and sometimes in poetry, an object should not be quite precise. In your novel of Andrevola and Gabriotto, you afford me an illustration.

> Le pareva dal corpo di lui uscire una
> cosa oscura e terribile.

This is like a dream: this *is* a dream. Afterward, you present to us such palpable forms and pleasing colours as may relieve and soothe us.

> Ed avendo molte rose, bianche e vermi-
> glie, colte, perciocche la stagione era.

BOCCACCIO.

Surely you now are mocking me. The roses I perceive, would not have been there, had it not been the season.

PETRARCA.

A poet often does more and better than he is aware at the time, and seems at last to know as little about it as a silkworm knows about the fineness of her thread.

The uncertain dream that still hangs over us in the novel, is intercepted and hindered from hurting us by the spell of the roses, of the white and the red: a word the less would have rendered it incomplete. The very warmth and geniality of the season shed their kindly influence on us; and we are renovated, and ourselves again, by virtue of the clear fountain where we rest. Nothing of this poetical providence comes to our relief in Dante, though we want it oftener. It would be difficult to form an idea of a poem, into which so many personages are introduced, containing so few deli-

neations of character, so few touches that excite our sympathy, so few elementary signs for our instruction, so few topics for our delight, so few excursions for our recreation. Nevertheless, his powers of language are prodigious; and, in the solitary places where he exerts his force rightly, the stroke is irresistible. But how greatly to be pitied must he be, who can find nothing in paradise better than steril theology! And what an object of sadness and of consternation, he who rises up from hell like a giant refreshed!

BOCCACCIO.

Strange perversion! A pillar of smoke by day and of fire by night; to guide no one. Paradise had fewer wants for him to satisfy than hell had; all which he fed to repletion. But let us rather look to his poetry than his temper.

PETRARCA.

We will, then.

A good poem is not divided into little panes like a cathedral window; which little panes

themselves are broken and blurred, with a saint's coat on a dragon's tail, a doctor's head on the bosom of a virgin martyr, and having about them more lead than glass, and more gloom than colouring. A good satire, or good comedy, if it does not always smile, rarely and briefly intermits it, and never rages. A good epic shows us more and more distinctly, at every book of it we open, the features and properties of heroic character, and terminates with accomplishing some momentous action. A good tragedy shows us that greater men than ourselves have suffered more severely and more unjustly; that the highest human power hath suddenly fallen helpless and extinct; or, what is better to contemplate, and usefuller to know, that uncontrolled by law, unaccompanied by virtue, unfollowed by contentment, its possession is undesirable and unsafe! Sometimes we go away in triumph with Affliction proved and purified, and leave her under the smiles of heaven. In all these consummations the object

is excellent; and here is the highest point to which poetry can attain. Tragedy has no bye-paths, no resting-places; there is everywhere action and passion. What do we find of this nature, or what of the epic, in the Orpheus and Judith, the Charon and Can della Scala, the Sinon and Maestro Adamo?

BOCCACCIO.

Personages strangely confounded. In this category it required a strong hand to make Pluto and Pepe Satan keep the peace, both having the same pretensions, and neither the sweetest temper.

PETRARCA.

Then the description of Mahomet is indecent and filthy. Yet Dante is scarcely more disgusting in this place, than he is insipid and spiritless in his allegory of the marriages, between Saint Francesco and Poverty, Saint Dominico and Faith. I speak freely and plainly to you, Giovanni, and the rather, as you have informed me that I have been thought invidious

to the reputation of our great poet; for such he is transcendently, in the midst of his imperfections. Such likewise were Ennius and Lucilius in the same period of Roman literature. They were equalled, and perhaps excelled: will Dante ever be, in his native tongue? The past generations of his countrymen, the glories of old Rome, fade before him the instant he springs upward, but they impart a more constant and a more genial delight.

BOCCACCIO.

They have less hair-cloth about them, and smell less cloisterly; yet they are only choristers.

The generous man, such as you, praises and censures with equal freedom, not with equal pleasure: the freedom and the pleasure of the ungenerous are both contracted, and lie only on the left hand.

PETRARCA.

When we point out to our friends an object in the country, do we wish to diminish it? do

we wish to show it overcast? Why then should we in those nobler works of the creation, God's only representatives, who have cleared our intellectual sight for us, and have displayed before us things more magnificent than Nature would without them have revealed?

We poets are heated by proximity. Those who are gone, warm us by the breath they leave behind them in their course; and *only* warm us: those who are standing near, and just before, fever us. Solitude has kept me uninfected; unless you may hint, perhaps, that pride was my preservative against the malignity of a worse disease.

BOCCACCIO.

It might well be, though it were not; you having been crowned in the capital of the christian world.

PETRARCA.

That indeed would have been something, if I had been crowned for my christianity, of which I suspect there are better judges in

Rome than there are of poetry. I would rather be preferred to my rivals by the two best critics of the age than by all the others; who, if they think differently from the two wisest in these matters, must necessarily think wrong.

BOCCACCIO.

You know that not only the two first, but many more, prefer you; and that neither they, nor any who are acquainted with your character, can believe that your strictures on Dante are invidious or uncandid.

PETRARCA.

I am borne toward him by many strong impulses. Our families were banished by the same faction: he himself and my father left Florence on the same day, and both left it for ever. This recollection would rather make me cling to him than cast him down. Ill fortune has many and tenacious ties; good fortune has few and fragile ones. I saw our illustrious fellow citizen once only, and when I was a child. Even the sight of such a poet, in early days, is dear to him who

aspires to become one, and the memory is always in his favour. The worst I can recollect to have said against his poem to others, is, that the architectural fabric of the *Inferno* is unintelligible without a long study, and only to be understood after distracting our attention from its inhabitants. Its locality and dimensions are at last uninteresting, and would better have been left in their obscurity. The zealots of Dante compare it, for invention, with the infernal regions of Homer and Virgil. I am ignorant how much the Grecian poet invented, how much existed in the religion, how much in the songs and traditions of the people. But surely our Alighieri has taken the same idea, and even made his descent in the same part of Italy, as Eneas had done before. In the Odyssea the mind is perpetually relieved by variety of scene and character. There are vices enough in it, but rising from lofty or from powerful passions, and under the veil of mystery and poetry: there are virtues, too, enough, and

human and definite and practicable. We have man, although a shade, in his own features, in his own dimensions: he appears before us neither cramped by systems nor jaundiced by schools; no savage, no cit, no cannibal, no doctor. Vigorous and elastic, he is such as Poetry saw him first; he is such as poetry would ever see him. In Dante, the greater part of those who are not degraded, are debilitated and distorted. No heart swells here, either for overpowered valour or for unrequited love. In the shades alone, but in the shades of Homer, does Ajax rise to his full loftiness: in the shades alone, but in the shades of Virgil, is Dido the arbitress of our tears.

BOCCACCIO.

I must confess there are nowhere two whole cantos in Dante which will bear a sustained and close comparison with the very worst book of the Odyssea or the Eneid: that there is nothing of the same continued and unabated excellence, as Ovid's, in the contention for the armour of

Achilles; the most heroic of heroic poetry, and only censurable, if censurable at all, because the eloquence of the braver man is more animated and more persuasive than his successful rival's. I do not think Ovid the best poet that ever lived, but I think he wrote the most of good poetry, and, in proportion to its quantity, the least of bad or indifferent. The *Inferno*, the *Purgatorio*, the *Paradiso*, are pictures from the walls of our churches and chapels and monasteries, some painted by Giotto and Cimabue, some earlier. In several of these we detect not only the cruelty, but likewise the satire and indecency of Dante. Sometimes there is also his vigour and simplicity, but oftener his harshness and meagreness and disproportion. I am afraid the good Alighieri, like his friends the painters, was inclined to think the angels were created only to flagellate and burn us; and Paradise only for us to be driven out of it. And in truth, as we have seen it exhibited, there is but little hardship in the case.

The opening of the third canto of the *Inferno* has always been much admired. There is indeed a great solemnity in the words of the inscription on the portal of hell: nevertheless, I do not see the necessity for three verses out of six. After

Per me si va nell' eterno dolore,

it surely is superfluous to subjoin

Per me si va fra la perduta gente;

for, beside the *perduta gente*, who else can suffer the eternal woe? And when the portal has told us that "*Justice moved the high Maker to make it*," surely it might have omitted the notification that his "*divine power*" did it.

Feccmi la divina potestate.

The next piece of information I wish had been conveyed even in darker characters, so that they never could have been decyphered. The following line is,

La somma Sapienza e 'l primo Amore.

If God's first love was hell-making, we might almost wish his affections were as mutable as

ours are: that is, if holy church would countenance us therein.

PETRARCA.

Systems of poetry, of philosophy, of government, form and model us to their own proportions. As our systems want the grandeur, the light, and the symmetry of the ancient, we cannot hope for poets, philosophers, or statesmen, of equal dignity. Very justly do you remark that our churches and chapels and monasteries, and even our shrines and tabernacles on the roadside, contain in painting the same punishments as Alighieri hath registered in his poem: and several of these were painted before his birth. Nor surely can you have forgotten that his master, Brunetto Latini, composed one on the same plan.

The Virtues and Vices, and persons under their influence, appear to him likewise in a wood, wherein he, like Dante, is bewildered. Old walls are the tablets both copy: the arrangement is the devise of Brunetto. Our religion

is too simple in its verities, and too penurious in its decorations, for poetry of high value. We cannot hope or desire that a pious Italian will ever have the audacity to restore to Satan a portion of his majesty, or to remind the faithful that he is a fallen angel.

BOCCACCIO.

No, no, Francesco; let us keep as much of him down as we can, and as long.

PETRARCA.

It might not, however, be amiss to remember that even human power is complacent in security, and that Omnipotence is ever omnipotent, without threats and fulminations.

BOCCACCIO.

These, however, are the main springs of sacred poetry, of which I think we already have enough.

PETRARCA.

But good enough?

BOCCACCIO.

Even much better would produce less effect

than that which has occupied our ears from childhood, and comes sounding and swelling with a mysterious voice from the deep and dark recesses of antiquity.

PETRARCA.

I see no reason why we should not revert, at times, to the first intentions of poetry. Hymns to the Creator were its earliest efforts.

BOCCACCIO.

I do not believe a word of it, unless He himself was graciously pleased to inspire the singer; of which we have received no account. I rather think it originated in pleasurable song, perhaps of drunkenness, and resembled the dithyrambic. Strong excitement alone could force and hurry men among words displaced, and exaggerated ideas.

Believing that man fell, first into disobedience, next into ferocity and fratricide, we may reasonably believe that war-songs were among the earliest of his intellectual exertions. When

he rested from battle he had leisure to think of love; and the skies, and the fountains, and the flowers, reminded him of her, the coy and beautiful, who fled to a mother from the ardour of his pursuit. In after years he lost a son, his companion in the croft and in the forest: images too grew up there, and rested on the grave. A daughter, who had wondered at his strength and wisdom, looked to him in vain for succour at the approach of death. Inarticulate grief gave way to passionate and wailing words, and Elegy was awakened. We have tears in this world before we have smiles, Francesco! we have struggles before we have composure; we have strife and complaints before we have submission and gratitude. I am suspicious that if we could collect the "winged words" of the earliest hymns, we should find that they called upon the Deity for vengeance. Priests and rulers were far from insensible to private wrongs. Chryses, in the Iliad, is willing that his king and country

should be enslaved, so that his daughter be sent back to him. David, in the Psalms, is no unimportunate or lukewarm applicant for the discomfiture and extermination of his adversaries: and, among the visions of felicity, none brighter is promised a fortunate warrior, than to dash the infants of his enemy against the stones. The Holy Scriptures teach us that the human race was created on the banks of the Euphrates, and where the river hath several branches. Here the climate is extremely hot; and men, like birds, in hot climates, never sing well. I doubt whether there was ever a good poet in the whole city and whole plain of Babylon. Egypt had none but such as she imported. Mountainous countries bear them as they bear the more fragrant plants and savoury game. Judæa had hers: Attica reared them among her thyme and hives: and Tuscany may lift her laurels not a span below. Never have the accents of poetry been heard on the fertile banks

of the Vistula; and Ovid taught the borderers of the Danube an indigenous* song in vain.

PETRARCA.

Orpheus, we hear, sang on the banks of the Hebrus.

BOCCACCIO.

The banks of the Hebrus may be level or rocky, for what I know about them: but the river is represented by the poets as rapid and abounding in whirlpools; hence, I presume, it runs among rocks and inequalities. Be this as it may: do you imagine that Thrace in those early days produced a philosophical poet?

PETRARCA.

We have the authority of history for it.

BOCCACCIO.

Bad authority, too, unless we sift and cross-examine it. Undoubtedly there were narrow paths of commerce, in very ancient times, from

* Aptaque sunt nostris barbara verba modis.

What are all the other losses of literature in comparison with this? TRANS.

the Euxine to the Caspian, and from the Caspian to the kingdoms of the remoter East. Merchants in those days were not only the most adventurous, but the most intelligent men: and there were ardent minds, uninfluenced by a spirit of lucre, which were impelled by the ardour of imagination into untravelled regions. Scythia was a land of fable, not only to the Greeks, but equally to the Romans. Thrace was a land of fable, we may well believe, to the nearest towns of northern India. I imagine that Orpheus, whoever he was, brought his knowledge from that quarter. We are too apt to fancy that Greece owed everything to the Phœnicians and Egyptians. The elasticity of her mind threw off, or the warmth of her imagination transmuted, the greater part of her earlier acquisitions. She was indebted to Phœnicia for nothing but her alphabet; and even these signs she modified, and endowed them with a portion of her flexibility and grace.

PETRARCA.

There are those who tell us that Homer lived before the age of letters in Greece.

BOCCACCIO.

I wish they knew the use of them as well as he did. Will they not also tell us that the commerce of the two nations was carried on without the numerals (and such were letters) by which traders cast up accounts? The Phœnicians traded largely with every coast of the Egean sea; and among their earliest correspondents were the inhabitants of the Greek maritime cities, insular and continental. Is it credible that Cyprus, that Crete, that Attica, should be ignorant of the most obvious means by which commerce was maintained? or that such means should be restricted to commerce, among a people so peculiarly fitted for social intercourse, so inquisitive, so imaginative, as the Greeks?

PETRARCA.

Certainly it is not.

BOCCACCIO.

The Greeks were the most creative, the Romans the least creative, of mankind. No Roman ever invented anything. Whence then are derived the only two works of imagination we find among them; the story of the *Ephesian* Matron*, and the story of *Psyche?* Doubtless from some country farther eastward than Phœnicia and Egypt. The authors in which we find these insertions are of little intrinsic worth.

When the Thracians became better known to the Greeks they turned their backs upon them as worn-out wonders, and looked toward the inexhaustible Hyperboreans. Among these, too, she placed wisdom and the arts, and mounted instruments through which a greater magnitude was given to the stars.

* One similar, and better conceived, is given by Du Halde from the Chinese. If the fiction of Psyche had reached Greece so early as the time of Plato, it would have caught his attention, and he would have delivered it down to us, however altered. TRANS.

PETRARCA.

I will remain no longer with you among the Thracians or the Hyperboreans. But in regard to low and level countries, as unproductive of poetry, I entreat you not to be too fanciful nor too exclusive. Virgil was born on the Mincio, and has rendered the city of his birth too celebrated to be mistaken.

BOCCACCIO.

He was born in the territory of Mantua, not in the city. He sang his first child's song on the shoulders of the Appenines; his first man's under the shadow of Vesuvius.

I would not assert that a great poet must necessarily be born on a high mountain: no, indeed, no such absurdity: but where the climate is hot, the plains have never shown themselves friendly to the imaginative faculties. We surely have more buoyant spirits on the mountain than below, but it is not requisite for this effect that our cradles should have been placed on it.

PETRARCA.

What will you say about Pindar?

BOCCACCIO.

I think it more probable that he was reared in the vicinity of Thebes than within the walls. For Beotia, like our Tuscany, has one large plain, but has also many eminences, and is bounded on two sides by hills.

Look at the vale of Capua! Scarcely so much as a sonnet was ever heard from one end of it to the other; perhaps the most spirited thing was some Carthaginian glee, from a soldier in the camp of Hannibal. Nature seems to contain in her breast the same milk for all, but feeding one with one aptitude, another for another; and, as if she would teach him a lesson as soon as he could look about him, she has placed the poet where the air is unladen with the exhalations of luxuriance.

PETRARCA.

In my delight to listen to you after so long an absence, I have been too unwary; and you have been speaking too much for one infirm. Greatly am I to blame, not to have moderated my plea-

sure and your vivacity. You must rest now: to-morrow we will renew our conversation.

BOCCACCIO.

God bless thee, Francesco! I shall be talking with thee all night in my slumbers. Never have I seen thee with such pleasure as to-day, excepting when I was deemed worthy by our fellow-citizens of bearing to thee, and of placing within this dear hand of thine, the sentence of recall from banishment, and when my tears streamed over the ordinance as I read it, whereby thy paternal lands were redeemed from the public treasury.

Again God bless thee! Those tears were not quite exhausted: take the last of them.

SECOND DAY'S INTERVIEW.

PETRARCA.

How have you slept, Giovanni?

BOCCACCIO.

Pleasantly, soundly, and quite long enough. You too, methinks, have enjoyed the benefit of riding; for you either slept well or began late. Do you rise in general three hours after the sun?

PETRARCA.

No indeed.

BOCCACCIO.

As for me, since you would not indulge me with your company an hour ago, I could do no-

thing more delightful than to look over some of your old letters.

PETRARCA.

Ours are commemorative of no reproaches, and laden with no regrets. Far from us,

With drooping wing the spell-bound spirit moves
O'er flickering friendships and extinguisht loves.

BOCCACCIO.

Ay, but as I want no record of your kindness now you are with me, I have been looking over those to other persons, on past occasions. In the latin one to the tribune, whom the people at Rome usually call *Rienzi*, I find you address him by the denomination of *Nicolaus Laurentii*. Is this the right one?

PETRARCA.

As we Florentines are fond of omitting the first syllable in proper names, calling Luigi *Gigi*, Giovanni *Nanni*, Francesco *Cecco*, in like manner at Rome they say *Renzi*, for Lorenzi, and by another corruption it has been pronounced and written Rienzi. Believe me, I should never

have ventured to address the personage who held and supported the highest dignity on earth, until I had ascertained his appellation: for nobody ever quite forgave, unless in the low and ignorant, a wrong pronunciation of his name; the humblest being of opinion that they have one of their own, and one both worth having and worth knowing. Even dogs, they observe, are not miscalled. It would have been as latin in sound, if not in structure, to write Rientius as Laurentius: but it would certainly have been offensive to a dignitary of his station, as being founded on a sportive and somewhat childish familiarity.

BOCCACCIO.

Ah Francesco! we were a good deal younger in those days; and hopes sprang up before us like mushrooms: the sun produced them, the shade produced them; every hill, every valley, every busy and every idle hour.

PETRARCA.

The season of hope precedes but little the

season of disappointment. Where the ground is unprepared, what harvest can be expected? Men bear wrongs more easily than irritations; and the Romans, who had sunk under worse degradation than any other people on record, rose up against the deliverer who ceased to consult their ignorance. I speak advisedly and without rhetoric on the foul depths of their debasement. The Jews, led captive into Egypt and into Babylon, were left as little corrupted as they were found; and perhaps some of their vices were corrected by the labours that were imposed on them. But the subjugation of the Romans was effected by the deviation of their morals, which the priesthood took away, giving them ceremonies and promises instead. God had indulged them in the exercise of power: first the kings abused it, then the consuls, then the tribunes. One only magistrate was remaining who never had violated it, farther than in petty frauds and fallacies suited to the occasion, not having at present more within his reach. It

was now his turn to exercise his functions, and no less grievously and despotically than the preceding had done. For this purpose the Pontifex Maximus needed some slight alterations in the popular belief; and he collected them from that Pantheon which Roman policy had enlarged at every conquest. The priests of Isis had acquired the highest influence in the city: those of Jupiter were jealous that foreign gods should become more than supplementary and subordinate: but as the women in general leaned towards Isis, it was in vain to contest the point, and prudent to adopt a little at a time from the discipline of the shaven brotherhood. The names and titles of the ancient gods had received many additions, and they were often asked which they liked best. Different ones were now given them; and gradually, here and there, the older dropped into desuetude. Then arose the star in the east; and all was manifested.

BOCCACCIO.

Ay, ay, but the second company of shepherds

sang to a different tune from the first, and put them out. Trumpeters ran in among them, horses neighed, tents waved their pennons, and commanders of armies sought to raise themselves to supreme authority, some by leading the faction of the ancient faith, and some by supporting the recenter. At last the priesthood succeeded to the power of the pretorian guard, and elected, or procured the election of, an emperor. Every man who loved peace and quiet took refuge in a sanctuary, now so efficient to protect him; and nearly all who had attained a preponderance in wisdom and erudition, brought them to bear against the worn-out and tottering institutions, and finally to raise up the coping-stone of an edifice which overtopped them all.

PETRARCA.

At present we fly to princes as we fly to caves and arches, and other things of the mere earth, for shelter and protection.

BOCCACCIO.

And when they afford it at all, they afford it with as little care and knowledge. Like Egyptian embalmers, they cast aside the brains as useless or worse, but carefully swathe up all that is viler and heavier, and place it in their painted catacombs.

PETRARCA.

What Dante saw in his day, we see in ours. The danger is, lest first the wiser, and soon afterward the unwiser, in abhorrence at the presumption and iniquity of the priesthood, should abandon religion altogether, when it is forbidden to approach her without such company.

BOCCACCIO.

Philosophy is but the calix of that plant of paradise, religion. Detach it, and it dies away; meanwhile the plant itself, supported by its proper nutriment, retains its vigour.

PETRARCA.

The good citizen and the calm reasoner come

at once to the same conclusion; that philosophy can never hold many men together; that religion can; and those who, without it, would not let philosophy, nor law, nor humanity exist. Therefore it is our duty and interest to remove all obstruction from it; to give it air, light, space, and freedom, carrying in our hands a scourge for fallacy, a chain for cruelty, and an irrevocable ostracism for riches that riot in the house of God.

BOCCACCIO.

Moderate wealth is quite enough to teach with.

PETRARCA.

The luxury and rapacity of the church, together with the insolence of the barons, excited that discontent which emboldened Nicolo de Rienzi to assume the station of tribune. Singular was the prudence, and opportune the boldness, he manifested at first. His modesty, his piety, his calm severity, his unbiassed justice, won to him the affections of every good

citizen, and struck horror into the fastnesses of every castellated felon. He might by degrees have restored the republic of Rome, had he preserved his moderation: he might have become the master of Italy, had he continued the master of himself: but he allowed the weakest of the passions to run away with him: he fancied he could not inebriate himself soon enough with the intemperance of power. He called for seven crowns, and placed them successively on his head. He cited Lewis of Bavaria and Charles of Bohemia to appear and plead their causes before him; and, lastly, not content with exasperating and concentrating the hostility of barbarians, he set at defiance the best and highest feelings of his more instructed countrymen, and displayed his mockery of religion and decency by bathing in the porphyry font of the Lateran. How my soul grieved for his defection! How bitterly burst forth my complaints, when he ordered the imprisonment of Stefano Colonna in his ninetieth year! For these

atrocities you know with what reproaches I assailed him, traitor as he was to the noblest cause that ever strung the energies of mankind. For this cause, under his auspices, I had abandoned all hope of favour and protection from the pontif. I had cast into peril, almost into perdition, the friendship, familiarity, and love of the Colonnas. Even you, Giovanni, thought me more rash than you would say you thought me, and wondered at seeing me whirled along with the tempestuous triumphs that seemed mounting toward the capitol. It is only in politics that an action appears greater by the magnitude of the theatre; and we readily and enthusiastically give way to the deception. Indeed, whenever a man capable of performing great and glorious actions is emerging from obscurity, it is our duty to remove, if we can, all obstruction from before him, to increase his scope and his powers, to extol and amplify his virtues. This is always requisite, and often insufficient, to counteract the workings of ma-

lignity round about him. But finding him afterward false and cruel, and, instead of devoting himself to the commonwealth, exhausting it by his violence and sacrificing it to his vanity, then it behoves us to stamp the foot, and to call in the people to cast down the idol. For nothing is so immoral or pernicious as to keep up the illusion of greatness in wicked men. Their crimes, because they have fallen into the gulph of them, we call misfortunes; and, amidst ten thousand mourners, grieve only for him who made them so. Is this reason? is this humanity?

BOCCACCIO.

Alas! it is man.

PETRARCA.

Can we wonder then that such wretches have turned him to such purposes? The calmness, the sagacity, the sanctitude of Rienzi, in the ascent to his elevation, rendered him only the more detestable for his abuse of power.

BOCCACCIO.

Surely the man grew mad.

PETRARCA.

Men often give the hand to the madness that seizes them. He yielded to pride and luxury: behind them came jealousy and distrust: fear followed these, and cruelty followed fear. Then the intellects sought the subterfuge that bewildered them; and an ignoble flight was precluded by an ignominious death.

BOCCACCIO.

No mortal is less to be pitied, or more to be detested, than he into whose hands are thrown the fortunes of a nation, and who squanders them away in the idle gratification of his pride and his ambition. Are not these already gratified to the full, by the confidence and deference of his countrymen? Can silks, and the skins of animals, can hammered metals and sparkling stones, enhance the value of legitimate dominion over the human heart? Can a wise man be desirous of having a less wise successor? And, of all the world, would he exhibit this inferi-

ority in a son? Irrational as are all who aim at despotism, this is surely the most irrational of their speculations. Vulgar men are more anxious for title and decoration than for power; and notice, in their estimate, is preferable to regard. We ought as little to mind the extinction of such existences as the dying down of a favourable wind in the prosecution of a voyage. They are fitter for the calendar than for history, and it is well when we find them in last year's.

PETRARCA.

What a year was Rienzi's last to me! What an extinction of all that had not been yet extinguished! Visionary as was the flash of his glory, there was another more truly so, which this, my second great loss and sorrow, opened again before me:

Nor youth nor age nor virtue can avoid
Miseries that fly in darkness through the world,
Striking at random, irremissibly,
Until our sun sinks through the waves, until
The golden brim melts from its brightest cloud,
And all that we have seen hath disappeared.

Verona! loveliest of cities, but saddest to my memory! while the birds were singing in thy cypresses the earliest notes of spring, the blythest of hope, the tenderest of desire, she, my own Laura, fresh as the dawn around her, stood before me. It was her transit; I knew it ere she spake.*

O Giovanni! the heart that has once been bathed in love's pure fountain, retains the pulse of youth for ever. Death can only take away the sorrowful from our affections: the flower expands; the colourless film that enveloped it falls off and perishes.

BOCCACCIO.

We may well believe it: and, believing it, let us cease to be disquieted for their absence who have but retired into another chamber. We are like those who have overslept the hour: when we rejoin our friends, there is only the more

* This event is related by Petrarca as occurring on the sixth of April, the day of her decease.

joyance and congratulation. Would we break a precious vase, because it is as capable of containing the bitter as the sweet? No: the very things which touch us the most sensibly are those which we should be the most reluctant to forget. The noble mansion is most distinguished by the beautiful images it retains of beings past away; and so is the noble mind.

The damps of autumn sink into the leaves and prepare them for the necessity of their fall: and thus insensibly are we, as years close round us, detached from our tenacity of life by the gentle pressure of recorded sorrows. When the graceful dance and its animating music are over, and the clapping of hands (so lately linked) hath ceased; when youth and comeliness and pleasantry are departed,

Who would desire to spend the following day
Among the extinguisht lamps, the faded wreaths,
The dust and desolation left behind?

But whether we desire it or not, we must submit. He who hath appointed our days hath

placed their contents within them, and our efforts can neither cast them out nor change their quality. In our present mood we will not dwell too long on this subject, but rather walk forth into the world, and look back again on the bustle of life. Neither of us may hope to exert in future any extraordinary influence on the political movements of our country, by our presence or intervention: yet surely it is something to have set at defiance the mercenaries who assailed us, and to have stood aloof from the distribution of the public spoils. I have at all times taken less interest than you have taken in the affairs of Rome; for the people of that city neither are, nor were of old, my favourites.

It appears to me that there are spots accursed, spots doomed to eternal sterility; and Rome is one of them. No gospel announces the glad tidings of resurrection to a fallen nation. Once down, and down for ever. The Babylonians, the Macedonians, the Romans, prove it. Babylon is a desart, Macedon a den

of thieves, Rome (what is written as an invitation on the walls of her streets) one vast *immondezzaio*, morally and substantially.

PETRARCA.

The argument does not hold good throughout. Persia was conquered: yet Persia long afterward sprung up again with renovated strength and courage, and Sapor mounted his war-horse from the crouching neck of Valentinian. In nearly all her campaigns with the Romans she came off victorious: none of her kings or generals was ever led in triumph to the capitol; but several Roman emperors lay prostrate on their purple in the fields of Parthia. Formidable at home, victorious over friends and relatives, their legions had seized and subdivided the arable plains of Campania, and the exuberant pastures of the Po; but the glebe that bordered the Araxes was unbroken by them. Persia, since those times, has passed through many vicissitudes, of defeat and victory, of obscurity and glory: and why may not our country? Let us

take hopes where we can find them, and raise them where we find none.

BOCCACCIO.

In some places we may; in others, the fabric of hopes is too arduous an undertaking. When I was in Rome nothing there reminded me of her former state, until I saw a goose in the grass under the Capitoline hill. This perhaps was the only one of her inhabitants that had not degenerated. Even the dogs looked sleepy, mangy, suspicious, perfidious, and thievish. The goose meanwhile was making his choice of herbage about triumphal arches and monumental columns, and picking up worms; the surest descendants, the truest representatives, and enjoying the inalienable succession of the Cæsars. This is all that goose or man can do at Rome. She, I think, will be the last city to rise from the dead.

PETRARCA.

There is a trumpet, and on earth, that shall awaken even her.

BOCCACCIO.

I should like to live and be present.

PETRARCA.

This cannot be expected. But you may live many years, and see many things to make you happy. For you will not close the doors too early in the evening of existence against the visits of renovating and cheerful thoughts, which keep our lives long up, and help them to sink at last without pain or pressure.

BOCCACCIO.

Another year or two perhaps, with God's permission. Fra Biagio felt my pulse on Wednesday, and cried, "Courage! ser Giovanni! there is no danger of paradise yet: the Lord forbid!"

"Faith!" said I, "Fra Biagio! I hope there is not. What with prayers and masses, I have planted a foot against my old homestead, and will tug hard to remain where I am."

"A true soldier of the faith!" quoth Fra Biagio, and drank a couple of flasks to my

health. Nothing else, he swore to Assunta, would have induced him to venture beyond one; he hating all excesses, they give the adversary such advantage over us; although God is merciful and makes allowances.

PETRARCA.

Impossible as it is to look far and with pleasure into the future, what a privilege is it, how incomparably greater than any other that genius can confer, to be able to direct the backward flight of fancy and imagination to the recesses they most delighted in. To be able, as the shadows lengthen in our path, to call up before us the youth of our sympathies in all their kindness and purity!

BOCCACCIO.

Mine must have been very pure, I suspect, for I am sure they were very tender. But I need not call them up; they come readily enough of their own accord; and I find it perplexing at times to get entirely rid of them. Sighs are very troublesome when none meet

them half-way. The worst of mine now are while I am walking uphill. Even to walk up-stairs, which used occasionally to be as pleasant an exèrcise as any, grows sadly too much for me. For which reason I lie here below; and it is handier too for Assunta.

PETRARCA.

Very judicious and considerate. In high situations, like Certaldo and this viletta, there is no danger from fogs or damps of any kind. The skylark yonder seems to have made it her first station in the air.

BOCCACCIO.

To welcome thee, Francesco!

PETRARCA.

Rather say, to remind us both of our Dante. All the verses that ever were written on the nightingale are scarcely worth the beautiful triad of this divine poet on the lark.

La lodoletta che in aere si spazia,
Prima cantando, e poi tace contenta
Dell' ultima dolcezza che la sazia.

In the first of them, do not you see the twinkling of her wings against the sky? As often as I repeat them my ear is satisfied, my heart (like her's) contented.

BOCCACCIO.

I agree with you in the perfect and unrivalled beauty of the first; but in the third there is a redundance. Is not *contenta* quite enough, without *che la sazia?* The picture is before us, the sentiment within us, and behold! we kick when we are full of manna.

PETRARCA.

I acknowledge the correctness and propriety of your remark; and yet beauties in poetry must be examined as carefully as blemishes, and even more; for we are more easily led away by them, although we do not dwell on them so long. We two should never be accused, in those days, of malevolence to Dante, if the whole world heard us. Being here alone, we may hazard our opinions even less guardedly, and set each other right as we see occasion.

BOCCACCIO.

Come on then; I will venture. I will go back to find fault; I will seek it even in Francesca.

To hesitate, and waver, and turn away from the subject, was proper and befitting in her. The verse, however, in no respect satisfies me. Any one would imagine from it that *Galeotto* was really both the title of the book and the name of the author; neither of which is true. *Galeotto*, in the *Tavola Ritonda*, is the person who interchanges the correspondence between Lancilotto and Ginevra. The appellation is now become the generic of all men whose business it is to promote the success of others in illicit love. Dante was stimulated in his satirical vein, when he attributed to Francesca a ludicrous expression, which she was very unlikely in her own nature, and greatly more so in her state of suffering, to employ or think of, whirled round as she was incessantly with her lover. Neither was it requisite to say, "the

book was a Galeotto, and so was the author," when she had said already that a passage in it had seduced her. Omitting this unnecessary and ungraceful line, her confusion and her delicacy are the more evident, and the following comes forth with fresh beauty. In the commencement of her speech I wish these had likewise been omitted,

E cio sa il tuo dottore;

since he knew no more about it than anybody else. As we proceed, there are passages in which I cannot find my way, and where I suspect the poet could not show it me. For instance, is it not strange that Briareus should be punished in the same way as Nimrod, when Nimrod sinned against the living God, and when Briareus attempted to overthrow one of the living God's worst antagonists, Jupiter? an action which our blessed Lord, and the doctors of holy church, not only attempted, but (to their glory and praise for evermore) accomplished.

PETRARCA.

Equally strange that Brutus and Cassius (a remark which escaped us in our mention of them yesterday) should be placed in the hottest pit of hell for slaying Cæsar, and that Cato, who would have done the same thing with less compunction, should be appointed sole guardian and governor of purgatory.

BOCCACCIO.

What interest could he have made to be promoted to so valuable a post, in preference to doctors, popes, confessors, and fathers? Wonderful indeed! and they never seemed to take it much amiss.

PETRARCA.

Alighieri not only throws together the most opposite and distant characters, but even makes Jupiter and our Saviour the same person.

E se lecito m'è, o sommo *Giove!*
Che fosti in terra per noi *crocifisso.*

BOCCACCIO.

Jesus Christ ought no more to be called Ju-

piter than Jupiter ought to be called Jesus Christ.

PETRARCA.

In the whole of the *Inferno* I find only the descriptions of Francesca and of Ugolino at all admirable. Vigorous expressions there are many, but lost in their application to base objects; and insulated thoughts in high relief, but with everything crumbling round them. Proportionally to the extent, there is a scantiness of poetry, if delight is the purpose or indication of it. Intensity shews everywhere the powerful master: and yet intensity is not invitation. A great poet may do everything but repel us. Established laws are pliant before him: nevertheless his office hath both its duties and its limits.

BOCCACCIO.

The simily in the third canto, the satire at the close of the fourth, and the description at the commencement of the eighth, if not highly

admirable, are what no ordinary poet could have produced.

PETRARCA.

They are streaks of light in a thunder-cloud. You might have added the beginning of the twenty-seventh, in which the poetry of itself is good, although not excellent, and the subject of it assuages the weariness left on us, after passing through so many holes and furnaces, and undergoing the dialogue between Simon and master Adam.

BOCCACCIO.

I am sorry to be reminded of this. It is like the brawl of the two fellows in Horace's *Journey to Brundusium*. They are the straitest parallels of bad wit and bad poetry that ancient and modern times exhibit. Ought I to speak so sharply of poets who elsewhere have given me so great delight?

PETRARCA.

Surely you ought. No criticism is less be-

neficial to an author or his reader than one tagged with favour and tricked with courtesy. The gratification of our humours is not the intent and scope of criticism, and those who indulge in it on such occasions are neither wise nor honest.

BOCCACCIO.

I never could see why we should designedly and prepensely give to one writer more than his due, to another less. If we offer an honest man ten crowns when we owe him only five, he is apt to be offended. The perfumer and druggist weigh out the commodity before them to a single grain. If they do it with odours and powders, should not we attempt it likewise, in what is either the nutriment or the medicine of the mind? I do not wonder that Criticism has never yet been clear-sighted and expert among us: I do, that she has never been dispassionate and unprejudiced. There are critics who, lying under no fear of a future state in literature, and all whose hope is for the present day, commit

injustice without compunction. Every one of these people has some favourite object for the embraces of his hatred, and a figure of straw will never serve the purpose. He must throw his stone at what stands out; he must twitch the skirt of him who is ascending. Do you imagine that the worst writers of any age were treated with as much asperity as you and I? No, Giovanni! give the good folks their due: they are humaner to their fellow-creatures.

PETRARCA.

Disregarding the ignorant and presumptuous, we have strengthened our language by dipping it afresh in its purer and higher source, and have called the Graces back to it. We never have heeded how Jupiter would have spoken, but only how the wisest men would, and how words follow the movements of the mind. There are rich and copious veins of mineral in regions far remote from commerce and habitations: these veins are useless: so are those writings of which the style is uninviting and inaccessible,

through its ruggedness, its chasms, its points, its perplexities, its obscurity. There are scarcely three authors, beside yourself, who appear to heed whether any guest will enter the gate, quite satisfied with the consciousness that they have stores within. Such wealth, in another generation, may be curious, but cannot be current. When a language grows up all into stalk, and its flowers begin to lose somewhat of their character, we must go forth into the open fields, through the dingles, and among the mountains, for fresh seed. Our ancestors did this, no very long time ago. Foremost in zeal, in vigour and authority, Alighieri took on himself the same patronage and guardianship of our adolescent dialect, as Homer of the greek: and my Giovanni hath since endowed it so handsomely, that additional bequests, we may apprehend, will only corrupt its principles, and render it lax and lavish.

BOCCACCIO.

Beware of violating those canons of criticism you have just laid down. We have no right to

gratify one by misleading another, nor, when we undertake to show the road, to bandage the eyes of him who trusts us for his conductor. In regard to censure, those only speak ill who speak untruly, unless a truth be barbed by malice and aimed by passion. To be useful to as many as possible is the especial duty of a critic, and his utility can only be attained by rectitude and precision. He walks in a garden which is not his own; and he neither must gather the blossoms to embellish his discourse, nor break the branches to display his strength. Rather let him shew what is out of order, and help to raise what is lying on the ground.

PETRARCA.

Auditors, and readers in general, come to hear or read, not your opinion delivered, but their own repeated. Fresh notions are as disagreeable to some as fresh air to others; and this inability to bear them is equally a symptom of disease. Impatience and intolerance are sure to be excited at any check to admiration in the narratives of Ugolino and of Francesca: nothing

is to be abated: they are not only to be admirable, but entirely faultless.

BOCCACCIO.

You have proved to me that, in blaming our betters, we ourselves may sometimes be unblamed. When authors are removed by death beyond the reach of irritation at the touch of an infirmity, we best consult their glory by handling their works comprehensively and unsparingly. Vague and indefinite criticism suits only slight merit, and presupposes it. Lineaments irregular and profound as Dante's, are worthy of being traced with patience and fidelity. In the charts of our globe we find distinctly marked the promontories and indentations, and oftentimes the direction of unprofitable marshes and impassable sands and wildernesses: level surfaces are unnoted. I would not detract one atom from the worth of Dante; which cannot be done by summing it up exactly, but may be by negligence in the computation.

PETRARCA.

Your business, in the lectures, is not to show

his merits, but his meaning; and to give only so much information as may be given without offence to the factious. Whatever you do beyond, is for yourself, your friends, and futurity.

BOCCACCIO.

I may write more lectures, but never shall deliver them in person, as the first. Probably, so near as I am to Florence, and so dear as Florence hath always been to me, I shall see that city no more. The last time I saw it, I only passed through. Four years ago, you remember, I lost my friend Acciaioli. Early in the summer of the preceding, his kindness had induced him to invite me again to Naples, and I undertook a journey to the place where my life had been too happy. There are many who pay dearly for sunshine early in the season: many, for pleasure in the prime of life. After one day lost in idleness at Naples, if intense and incessant thoughts (however fruitless) may be called so, I proceeded by water to Sorento, and thence over the mountains to Amalfi. Here, amidst whatever is most beautiful and most wonderful

in scenery, I found the Seniscalco. His palace, his gardens, his terraces, his woods, abstracted his mind entirely from the solicitudes of state; and I was gratified at finding, in the absolute ruler of a kingdom, the absolute master of his time. Rare felicity! and he enjoyed it the more after the toils of business and the intricacies of policy. His reception of me was most cordial. He showed me his long avenues of oranges and citrons: he helped me to mount the banks of slippery short herbage, whence we could look down on their dark masses, and their broad irregular belts, gemmed with golden fruit and sparkling flowers. We stood high above them, but not above their fragrance, and sometimes we wished the breeze to bring us it, and sometimes to carry a part of it away: and the breeze came and went as if obedient to our volition. Another day he conducted me farther from the palace, and showed me, with greater pride than I had ever seen in him before, the pale-green olives, on little smooth plants, the first year of

their bearing. "I will teach my people here," said he, "to make as delicate oil as any of our Tuscans." We had feasts among the caverns; we had dances by day under the shade of the mulberries, by night under the lamps of the arcade: we had music on the shore and on the water.

When next I stood before him, it was afar from these. Torches flamed through the pine-forest of the Certosa: priests and monks led the procession: the sound of the brook alone filled up the intervals of the dirge: and other plumes than the dancers' waved round what was Acciaioli.

PETRARCA.

Since in his family there was nobody who, from education or pursuits or consanguinity, could greatly interest him, nobody to whom so large an accumulation of riches would not rather be injurious than beneficial, and place rather in the way of scoffs and carpings than exalt to respectability, I regret that he omitted to provide for the comforts of your advancing years.

BOCCACCIO.

The friend would not spoil the philosopher. Our judgment grows the stronger by the dying-down of our affections.

PETRARCA.

With a careful politician and diplomatist all things find their places but men: and yet he thinks he has nitched it nicely, when, as the gardener is left in the garden, the tailor on his board at the casement, he leaves the author at his desk: to remove him would put the world in confusion.

BOCCACCIO.

Acciaioli knew me too well to suppose we could serve each other: and his own capacity was amply sufficient for all the exigences of the state. Generous, kind, constant soul! the emblazoned window throws now its rich mantle over him, moved gently by the vernal air of Marignole, or, as the great chapel-door is opened to some visiter of distinction, by the fresh eastern breeze from the valley of the Elsa. We too

(mayhap) shall be visited in the same condition; but in a homelier edifice, but in an humbler sepulchre, but by other and far different guests? While they are discussing and sorting out our merits, which are usually first discovered among the nettles in the church-yard, we will carry this volume with us, and show Dante what we have been doing.

PETRARCA.

Come, let us proceed with him.

Ugolino relates to him his terrible dream, in which he fancied that he had seen Gualando, Sismondi, and Lanfranco, killing his children: and he says that, when he awakened, he heard them moan in their sleep. In such circumstances, his awakening ought rather to have removed the impression he laboured under; since it showed him the vanity of the dream, and afforded him the consolation that the children were alive. Yet he adds immediately, what, if he were to speak it at all, he should have deferred,

"You are very cruel if you do not begin to grieve, considering what my heart presaged to me; and, if you do not weep at it, what is it you are wont to weep at?"

BOCCACCIO.

Certainly this is ill-timed; and the conference would indeed be better without it anywhere.

PETRARCA.

Farther on, in whatever way we interpret

Poscia più che 'l dolor potè 'l digiuno,

the poet falls sadly from his sublimity.

BOCCACCIO.

If the fact were as he mentions, he should have suppressed it, since we had already seen the most pathetic in the features, and the most horrible in the stride, of Famine. Knawing, not in hunger, but in rage and revenge, the archbishop's scull, is, in the opinion of many, rather ludicrous than tremendous.

PETRARCA.

In mine, rather disgusting than ludicrous: but Dante (we must whisper it) is the great master

of the disgusting. When the ancients wrote indecently and loosely, they presented what either had something alluring or something laughable about it, and, if they disgusted, it was involuntarily. Indecency is the most shocking in deformity. We call indecent, while we do not think it, the nakedness of the Graces and the Loves.

BOCCACCIO.

When we are less barbarous we shall become more familiar with them, more tolerant of sliding beauty, more hospitable to erring passion, and perhaps as indulgent to frailty as we now are to ferocity. I wish I could find in some epitaph, *he loved so many*; it is better than, *he killed so many*. Yet the world hangs in admiration over this; you and I should be found alone before the other.

PETRARCA.

Of what value are all the honours we can expect from the wisest of our species, when even the wisest hold us lighter in estimation than

those who labour to destroy what God delighted to create, came on earth to ransom, and suffered on the cross to save! Glory then, glory can it be, to devise with long study, and to execute with vast exertions, what the fang of a reptile or the leaf of a weed accomplishes in an hour? Shall any one tell me, that the numbers sent to death or to wretchedness make the difference, and constitute the great? Away then from the face of nature as we see her daily! away from the interminable varieties of animated creatures! away from what is fixed to the earth and lives by the sun and dew! brute inert matter does it: behold it in the pestilence, in the earthquake, in the conflagration, in the deluge!

BOCCACCIO.

Perhaps we shall not be liked the better for what we ourselves have written: yet I do believe we shall be thanked for having brought to light, and for having sent into circulation, the writings of other men. We deserve as much, were it only that it gives people an opportunity

of running over us, as ants over the images of gods in orchards, and of reaching by our means the less crude fruits of less ungenial days. Be this as it may, we have spent our time well in doing it, and enjoy (what idlers never can) as pleasant a view in looking back as forward.

Now do tell me, before we say more of the *Paradiso*, what I can offer in defence of the latin scraps from litanies and lauds, to the number of fifty or thereabout.

PETRARCA.

Say nothing at all, unless you can obtain some *Indulgences* for repeating them.

BOCCACCIO.

And then such verses as these, and several score of no better.

> I credo ch' ei credette ch' io credessi.
> O Jacomo, dicea, di sant Andrea.
> Come Livio scrisse, che non erra.
> Nel quale un cinque cento dieci e cinque.

Mille ducento con sessanta sei.
Pepe Satan, Pepe Satan, Pepè.
Raffael mai *amec, zabe, almi*.
Non avria pur dell orlo fatto *crich*.

PETRARCA.

There is no occasion to look into and investigate a puddle; we perceive at first sight its impurity; but it is useful to analyze, if we can, a limpid and sparkling water, in which the common observer finds nothing but transparency and freshness: for in this, however, the idle and ignorant ridicule our process, we may exhibit what is unsuspected, and separate what is insalubrious. We must do then for our poet that which other men do for themselves; we must defend him by advancing the best authority for something as bad or worse; and although it puzzle our ingenuity, yet we may almost make out in quantity, and quite in quality, our spicilege from Virgil himself. If younger men were present, I would admonish and exhort them to abate no more of their reverence for the Roman

poet on the demonstration of his imperfections, than of their love for a parent or guardian who had walked with them far into the country, and had shewn them its many beauties and blessings, on his lassitude or his debility. Never will such men receive too much homage. He that can best discover their blemishes, will best appreciate their merit, and most zealously guard their honour. The flippancy with which genius is often treated by mediocrity, is the surest sign of a prostrate mind's incontinence and impotence. It will gratify the national pride of our Florentines, if you shew them how greatly the nobler parts of their fellow-citizen surpass the loftiest of his Mantuan guide.

BOCCACCIO.

Of Virgil?

PETRARCA.

Even so.

BOCCACCIO.

He had no suspicion of his equality with this prince of Roman poets, whose footsteps he fol-

lows with reverential and submissive obsequiousness.

PETRARCA.

Have you never observed that persons of high rank universally treat their equals with deference; and that ill-bred ones are often smart and captious? Even their words are uttered with a brisk and rapid air, a tone higher than the natural, to sustain the factitious consequence and vapouring independence they assume. Small-critics and small poets take all this courage when they licentiously shut out the master; but Dante really felt the veneration he would impress. Suspicion of his superiority he had none whatever, nor perhaps have you yourself much more.

BOCCACCIO.

I take all proper interest in my author; I am sensible to the duties of a commentator; but in truth I dare hardly entertain that exalted notion. I should have the whole world against me.

PETRARCA.

You must expect it for *any* exalted notion; for anything that so startles a prejudice as to arouse a suspicion that it may be dispelled. You must expect it if you throw open the windows of infection. Truth is only unpleasant in its novelty. He who first utters it, says to his hearer, *You are less wise than I am.* Now who likes this?

BOCCACCIO.

But surely if there are some very high places in our Alighieri, the inequalities are perpetual and vast; whereas the regularity, the continuity, the purity of Virgil, are proverbial.

PETRARCA.

It is only in literature that what is proverbial is suspicious; and mostly in poetry. Do we find in Dante, do we find in Ovid, such tautologies and flatnesses as these,

Quam si dura silex . . *aut stet Marpessia cautes*
Majus adorta nefas . . *majoremque orsa furorem.*

Arma *amens* capio . . nec *sat rationis* in armis.
Superatne . . *et vescetur aura*
Ætheria . . *neque adhuc credelibus occubat umbris?*
Omnes . . cœlicolas . . omnes supera alta tenentes.
Scuta *latentia condunt.*
Has inter voces . . *media inter talia verba.*
Finem dedit . . *ore loquendi.*
Insonuere cavæ . . *sonitumque dedere cavernæ.*
Ferro accitam . . crebrisque *bipennibus.*
Nec nostri generis puerum . . *nec sanguinis.*

BOCCACCIO.

These things look very ill in latin; and yet they had quite escaped my observation. We often find, in the Psalms of David, one section of a sentence placed as it were in symmetry with another, and not at all supporting it by presenting the same idea. It is a species of piety to drop the nether lip in admiration; but in reality it is not only the modern taste that is vitiated; the ancient is little less so, although differently. To say over again what we have just ceased to say, with nothing added, nothing improved, is equally bad in all languages and all times.

Surely you have ransacked poor Virgil to the skin, and have stripped him clean.

PETRARCA.

Of all who have ever dealt with *Winter*,* he is the most frost-bitten. Hesiod's description of the snowy season is more poetical and more formidable. What do you think of these icicles,

* Œraque dissiliunt vulgo; *vestesque rigescunt!*

BOCCACCIO.

Wretched falling-off.

PETRARCA.

He comes close enough presently.

Stiriaque hirsutis dependent horrida barbis.

We will withdraw from the Alps into the city. And now are you not smitten with reverence at seeing

Romanos rerum dominos; *gentemque togatam?*

* These verses are noticed in the Treatise "De usu latini sermonis." Remarks on the characters of *Proteus, Mazentius,* &c., may be found in the *Imaginary Conversation* of Tooke and Johnson. Some who read this volume may never read those.

The masters of the world—and *long-tailed coats!*

Come to Carthage. What a recommendation to a beautiful queen does Eneas offer, in himself and his associates!

Lupi ceu
Raptores; atrâ in nebulâ, quos *improba ventris*
Exegit cæcos rabies!

Ovid is censured for his

Consiliis non *curribus* utere nostris.

Virgil never for

Inceptoque et *sedibus* hæret in iisdem.

The same in its quality, but more forced. Of all faults, however, the *hypallage* is incomparably the worst, and seems Virgil's favourite. Such is

Odor attulit auras.

The affectation of Ovid was light and playful; Virgil's was wilful, perverse, and grammatistical. Are we therefore to suppose that every hand able to elaborate a sonnet may be raised up

against the majesty of Virgil? Is ingratitude so rare and precious, that we should prefer the exposure of his faults to the enjoyment of his harmony? He first delivered it to his countrymen in unbroken links, under the form of poetry, and consoled them for the eloquent tongue that had withered on the Rostra. It would be no difficult matter to point out at least twenty bad passages in the Eneid, and a proportionate number of worse in the Georgics. In your comparison of poet with poet, the defects as well as the merits of each, ought to be placed side by side. This is the rather to be expected, as Dante professes to be Virgil's disciple. You may easily show that his humility no more became him than his fierceness.

BOCCACCIO.

You have praised the harmony of the Roman poet. Now in single verses I think our poetry is sometimes more harmonious than the latin, but never in whole sentences. Advantage could perhaps be taken of our metre if we broke

through the stanza. Our language is capable, I think, of all the vigour and expression of the latin; and, in regard to the pauses in our versification, in which chiefly the harmony of metre consists, we have greatly the advantage. What for instance is more beautiful than your

Solo . . e pensoso . . i piu deserti campi
Vo . . misurando . . a passi tardi . . e lenti.

PETRARCA.

My critics have found fault with the *lenti*, calling it an expletive, and ignorant that equally in italian and latin the word signifies both *slow* and *languid*, while *tardi* signifies *slow* only.

BOCCACCIO.

Good poetry, like good music, pleases most people, but the ignorant and inexpert lose half its pleasures, the invidious lose them all. What a paradise lost is here!

PETRARCA.

If we deduct the inexpert, the ignorant, and the invidious, can we correctly say it pleases most people? But either my worst composi-

tions are the most admired, or the insincere and malignant bring them most forward for admiration, keeping the others in the back-ground! Sonnetteers, in consequence, have started up from all quarters.

BOCCACCIO.

The sonnet seems peculiarly adapted to the languor of a melancholy and despondent love, the rhymes returning and replying to every plaint and every pulsation. Our poetasters are now converting it into the penfold and pound of stray thoughts and vagrant fancies. No sooner have they collected in their excursions as much matter as they conveniently can manage, than they seat themselves down and set busily to work, punching it neatly out with a clever cubic stamp of fourteen lines in diametre.

PETRARCA.

A pretty sonnet may be written on a lambkin or a parsnip; there being room enough for truth and tenderness on the edge of a leaf or the tip of an ear; but a great poet must clasp the

higher passions breast high, and compel them in an authoritative tone to answer his interrogatories.

We will now return again to Virgil, and consider in what relation he stands to Dante. Our Tuscan and Homer are never inflated.

BOCCACCIO.

Pardon my interruption; but do you find that Virgil is? Surely he has always borne the character of the most chaste, the most temperate, the most judicious among the poets.

PETRARCA.

And will not soon lose it. Yet never had there swelled, in the higher or the lower regions of poetry, such a gust as here, in the exordium of the Georgics.

Tuque adeo, quem mox quæ sint habitura deorum
Concilia incertum est, urbisne invisere, Cæsar,
Terrarumque velis curam, et te maximus orbis
Auctorem frugum?

BOCCACCIO.

Already forestalled!

PETRARCA.

. . . . tempestatumque potentem.

BOCCACCIO.

Very strange coincidence of opposite qualifications.

PETRARCA.

Accipiat, cingens maternâ tempora myrto:
An deus immensi venias maris . . . . .

BOCCACCIO.

Surely he would not put down Neptune!

PETRARCA.

. . . . ac tua nautæ
Numina sola colant: *tibi serviat ultima Thule.*

BOCCACCIO.

Catch him up! catch him up! uncoil the whole of the vessel's rope! never did man fall overboard so unluckily, or sink so deep on a sudden.

PETRARCA.

Teque sibi generum Tethys *emat omnibus undis?*

BOCCACCIO.

Nobody in his senses would bid against her:

What indiscretion! and at her time of life too!

Tethys then really, most gallant Cæsar!
If you would only condescend to please her,
With all her waves would your good graces buy,
And you should govern all the Isle of Skie.

PETRARCA.

Anne novum *tardis* sidus te mensibus addas?

BOCCACCIO.

For what purpose? If the months were *slow*, he was not likely to mend their speed by mounting another passenger. But the vacant place is such an inviting one!

PETRARCA.

Qua locus Erigonen inter Chelasque sequentes
Panditur.

BOCCACCIO.

Plenty of room, sir!

PETRARCA.

. . . . ipse tibi jam brachia contrahit ardens,
Scorpius . . .

BOCCACCIO.

I would not incommode him; I would beg him to be quite at his ease.

PETRARCA.

. . . . et cœli justâ plus parte reliquit.
Quicquid eris (nam te nec sperent Tartara regem
Nec tibi regnandi veniet tam dira cupido,
Quamvis Elysios miretur Græcia campos,
Nec repetita sequi curet Proserpina matrem.)

BOCCACCIO.

Was it not enough to have taken all Varro's Invocation, much enlarged, without adding these verses to the other twenty-three?

PETRARCA.

Vainly will you pass through all the later poets of the empire, and look for the like extravagance and bombast. Tell me candidly your opinion, not of the quantity but of the quality.

BOCCACCIO.

I had scarcely formed one upon them before. Honestly and truly, it is just such a rumbling rotundity as might have been blown, with much

ado, if Lucan and Nero had joined their pipes and puffed together into the same bladder. I never have admired, since I was a schoolboy, the commencement or the conclusion of the Georgics; an unwholesome and consuming fungus at the foot of the tree, a withered and loose branch at the summit.

BOCCACCIO.

Virgil and Dante are altogether so different, that, unless you will lend me your whole store of ingenuity, I shall never bring them to bear one upon the other.

PETRARCA.

Frequently the points of comparison are salient in proportion as the angles of similitude recede: and the absence of a quality in one man usually makes us recollect its presence in another; hence the comparison is at the same time natural and involuntary. Few poets are so different as Homer and Virgil, yet no comparison has been made oftener. Ovid, although un-

like Homer, is greatly more like him than Virgil is; for there is the same facility, and apparently the same negligence, in both. The great fault in the Metamorphoses is in the plan, as proposed in the argument,

primaque ab origine mundi
In mea *perpetuum* deducere tempora carmen.

Had he divided the more interesting of the tales, and omitted all the transformations, he would have written a greater number of exquisite poems than any author of Italy or Greece. He wants on many occasions the gravity of Virgil; he wants on all the variety of cadence; but it is a very mistaken notion that he either has heavier faults or more numerous. His natural air of levity, his unequalled and unfailing ease, have always made the contrary opinion prevalent. Errors and faults are readily supposed, in literature as in life, where there is much gaiety: and the appearance of ease, among those who never could acquire or understand it, excites a suspicion of negligence and faultiness. Of all the

ancient Romans, Ovid had the finest imagination; he likewise had the truest tact in judging the poetry of his contemporaries and predecessors. Compare his estimate with Quinctilian's of the same writers, and this will strike you forcibly. He was the only one of his countrymen who could justly appreciate the labours of Lucretius.

> Carmina Sublimis tunc sunt peritura Lucreti,
> Exitio terras quum dabit una dies.

And the kindness with which he rests on all the others, shows a benignity of disposition which is often lamentably deficient in authors who write tenderly upon imaginary occasions.

I begin to be inclined to your opinion in regard to the advantages of our italian versification. It surely has a greater variety, in its usual measure, than the latin in dactyls and spondees. We admit several feet into ours: the latin, if we believe the grammarians, admit only these, and at least seven verses in every ten conclude with a dissyllabic word.

BOCCACCIO.

We are taught indeed that the final foot of an hexameter is always a spondee: but our ears deny the assertion, and prove to us that it never is, any more than it is in the italian. In both the one and the other the last foot is uniformly a trochee in pronunciation. There is only one species of latin verse which ends with a true inflexible spondee, and this is the *scazon*. Its name of the *limper* is but little prepossessing, yet the two most beautiful and most perfect poems of the language are composed in it; the *Miser Catulle* and the *Sirmio*.

PETRARCA.

This is likewise my opinion of those two little golden images, which however are insufficient to raise Catullus on an equality with Virgil: nor would twenty such. Amplitude of dimensions is requisite to constitute the greatness of a poet, beside his symmetry of form and his richness of decoration. We have conversed more than once together on the defects and oversights of

the correct and elaborate Mantuan, but never without the expression of our gratitude for the exquisite delight he has afforded us. We may forgive him his Proteus and his Pollio; but we cannot well forbear to ask him, how Eneas came to know that Acragas was *formerly* the sire of high-mettled steeds, even if such had been the fact? But such was only the fact a thousand years afterward, in the reign of Gelon.

BOCCACCIO.

Was it *then*? Were the horses of Gelon and Theron and Hiero, of Agrigentine or Sicilian breed? The country was never celebrated for a race adapted to chariots; such horses were mostly brought from Thessaly, and probably some from Africa. I do not believe there was ever a fine one in Italy before the invasion of Pyrrhus. No doubt, Hannibal introduced many. Greece herself, I suspect, was greatly indebted to the studs of Xerxes for the noblest of her prizes on the Olympic plain. In the kingdom of Naples I have observed more horses of high

blood than in any other quarter of Italy. It is there that Pyrrhus and Hannibal were stationary: and, long after these, the most warlike of men, the Normans, took possession of the country. And the Normans would have horses worthy of their valour, had they unyoked them from the chariot of the sun. Subduers of France, of Sicily, of Cyprus, they made England herself accept their laws.

Virgil, I remember, in the Georgics, has given some directions in the choice of horses. He speaks unfavourably of the white: yet painters have been fond of representing the leaders of armies mounted on them. And the reason is quite as good as the reason of a writer on husbandry, Cato or Columella, for choosing a house-dog of a contrary colour: it being desirable that a general should be as conspicuous as possible, and a dog, guarding against thieves, as invisible.

I love beyond measure in Virgil his kindness toward dumb creatures. Although he repre-

sents his Mezentius as a hater of the Gods, and so inhuman as to fasten dead bodies to the living, and violates in him the unity of character more than character was ever violated before, we treat as impossible all he has been telling us of his atrocities, when we hear his allocution to Rhœbus.

PETRARCA.

The dying hero, for hero he is transcendently above all the others in the Eneid, is not only the kindest father, not only the most passionate in his grief for Lausus, but likewise gives way to manly sorrows for the mute companion of his warfare.

> Rhœbe diu, res si qua diu mortalibus usquam,
> Viximus.

Here the philosophical reflection addrest to the worthy quadruped, on the brief duration of human and equine life, is ill applied. It is not the thought for the occasion; it is not the thought for the man. He could no more have uttered it than Rhœbus could have appreciated it. This

is not however quite so great an absurdity as the tender apostrophe of the monster Proteus to the dead Eurydice. Beside, the youth of Lausus, and the activity and strength of Mezentius, as exerted in many actions just before his fall, do not allow us to suppose that he who says to his horse

Diu viximus,

had passed the meridian of existence.

BOCCACCIO.

Francesco! it is a pity you had no opportunity of looking into the mouth of the good horse Rhœbus: perhaps his teeth had not lost all their marks.

PETRARCA.

They would have been lost upon me, though horses' mouths to the intelligent are more trustworthy than many others.

BOCCACCIO.

I shall never dare to employ half your suggestions in our irritable city, for fear of raising

up two new factions, the Virgilians and the Dantists.

PETRARCA.

I wish in good truth and seriousness you could raise them, or anything like zeal for genius, with whomsoever it might abide.

BOCCACCIO.

You really have almost put me out of conceit with Virgil.

PETRARCA.

I have done a great wrong then both to him and you. Admiration is not the pursuivant to all the steps even of an admirable poet; but respect is stationary. Attend him where the ploughman is unyoking the sorrowful ox from his companion dead at the furrow; follow him up the arduous ascent where he springs beyond the strides of Lucretius; and close the procession of his glory with the coursers and cars of Elis.

THIRD DAY'S INTERVIEW.

It being now the Lord's day, Messer Francesco thought it meet that he should rise early in the morning, and bestir himself, to hear mass in the parish church at Certaldo. Whereupon he went on tiptoe, if so weighty a man could indeed go in such a fashion, and lifted softly the latch of Ser Giovanni's chamber-door, that he might salute him ere he departed, and occasion no wonder at the step he was about to take. He found Ser Giovanni fast asleep, with the missal wide open across his nose, and a pleasant smile on his genial joyous mouth. Ser Francesco leaned over the couch, closed his hands toge-

ther, and, looking with even more than his usual benignity, said in a low voice,

"God bless thee, gentle soul! the mother of purity and innocence protect thee!"

He then went into the kitchen, where he found the girl Assunta, and mentioned his resolution. She informed him that the horse had eaten his* two beans, and was as strong as a lion and as ready as a lover. Ser Francesco patted her on the cheek, and called her *semplicetta!* She was overjoyed at this honour from so great a man, the bosom friend of her good master, whom she had always thought the greatest man in the world, not excepting Monsignore, until he told her he was only a dog confronted with Ser Francesco. She tripped alertly across the paved court into the stable, and took down the saddle and bridle from the farther end of the rack. But Ser Francesco, with his natural

* Literally, *due fave,* the expression on such occasions to signify a small quantity.

politeness, would not allow her to equip his palfrey.

"This is not the work for maidens," said he; "return to the house, good girl!"

She lingered a moment, then went away; but, mistrusting the dexterity of Ser Francesco, she stopped and turned back again, and peeped through the half-closed door, and heard sundry sobs and wheezes round about the girth. Ser Francesco's wind ill seconded his intention; and, although he had thrown the saddle valiantly and stoutly in its station, yet the girths brought him into extremity. She entered again, and, dissembling the reason, asked him whether he would not take a small beaker of the sweet white wine before he set out, and offered to girdle the horse while his Reverence bitted and bridled him. Before any answer could be returned, she had begun. And having now satisfactorily executed her undertaking, she felt irrepressible delight and glee at being able to do what Ser Francesco had failed in. He was

scarcely more successful with his allotment of the labour; found unlooked-for intricacies and complications in the machinery, wondered that human wit could not simplify it, and declared that the animal had never exhibited such restiveness before. In fact, he never had experienced the same grooming. At this conjuncture, a green cap made its appearance, bound with straw-coloured ribbon, and surmounted with two bushy sprigs of hawthorn, of which the globular buds were swelling, and some bursting, but none yet open. It was young Simplizio Nardi, who sometimes came on the Sunday morning to sweep the court-yard for Assunta.

"O! this time you are come just when you were wanted," said the girl.

"Bridle, directly, Ser Francesco's horse, and then go away about your business."

The youth blushed, and kissed Ser Francesco's hand, begging his permission. It was soon done. He then held the stirrup; and Ser Francesco, with scarcely three efforts, was seated

and erect on the saddle. The horse however had somewhat more inclination for the stable than for the expedition; and, as Assunta was handing to the rider his long ebony staff, bearing an ivory caduceus, the quadruped turned suddenly round. Simplizio called him *bestiaccia!* and then, softening it, *poco garbato!* and proposed to Ser Francesco that he should leave the bastone behind, and take the crab-switch he presented to him, giving at the same time a sample of its efficacy, which covered the long grizzle hair of the worthy quadruped with a profusion of pink blossoms, like embroidery. The offer was declined; but Assunta told Simplizio to carry it himself, and to walk by the side of Ser Canonico quite up to the church-porch, having seen what a sad dangerous beast his reverence had under him.

With perfectly good-will, partly in the pride of obedience to Assunta, and partly to enjoy the renown of accompanying a canon of holy church, Simplizio did as she enjoined.

And now the sound of village bells, in many hamlets and convents and churches out of sight, was indistinctly heard, and lost again; and at last the five of Certaldo seemed to crow over the faintness of them all. The freshness of the morning was enough of itself to excite the spirits of youth; a portion of which never fails to descend on years that are far removed from it, if the mind has partaken in innocent mirth while it was its season and its duty to enjoy it. Parties of young and old passed the canonico and his attendant with mute respect, bowing and bare-headed, for that ebony staff threw its spell over the tongue, which the frank and hearty salutation of the bearer was inadequate to break. Simplizio, once or twice, attempted to call back an intimate of the same age with himself; but the utmost he could obtain was a *riveritissimo!* and a genuflexion to the rider. It is reported that a heart-burning rose up from it in the breast of a cousin, some days after-

too distinctly apparent in the long-drawn appellation of *Gnor** Simplizio.

Ser Francesco moved gradually forward, his steed picking his way along the lane, and looking fixedly on the stones with all the sobriety of a mineralogist. He himself was well satisfied with the pace, and told Simplizio to be sparing of the switch, unless in case of a hornet or gadfly. Simplizio smiled, toward the hedge, and wondered at the condescension of so great a theologian and astrologer, in joking with him about the gadflies and hornets in the beginning of April.

"Ah! there are men in the world who can make wit out of anything!" said he to himself. As they approached the walls of the town, the whole country was pervaded by a stirring and diversifying air of gladness. Laughter and songs and flutes and viols, inviting voices and

* Contraction of *signor*, customary in Tuscany.

complying responses, mingled with merry bells and with processional hymns, along the woodland paths and along the yellow meadows. It was really the *Lord's Day*, for he made his creatures happy in it, and their hearts were thankful. Even the cruel had ceased from cruelty; and the rich man alone exacted from the animal his daily labour. Ser Francesco made this remark, and told his youthful guide that he never had been before where he could not walk to church on a Sunday; and that nothing should persuade him to urge the speed of his beast, on the seventh day, beyond his natural and willing foot's-pace. He reached the gates of Certaldo more than half an hour before the time of service, and he found laurels suspended over them, and being suspended; and many pleasant and beautiful faces were protruded between the ranks of gentry and clergy who awaited him. Little did he expect such an attendance; but Fra Biagio of San Vivaldo, who himself had offered no obsequiousness or

respect, had scattered the secret of his visit throughout the whole country. A young poet, the most celebrated in the town, approached the canonico with a long scroll of verses, which fell below the knee, beginning,

"How shall we welcome our illustrious guest?"

To which Ser Francesco immediately replied, "Take your favourite maiden, lead the dance with her, and bid all your friends follow; you have a good half-hour for it."

Universal applauses succeeded, the music struck up, couples were instantly formed. The gentry on this occasion led out the cittadinanza, as they usually do in the villeggiatura, rarely in the carnival, and never at other times. The elder of the priests stood round in their sacred vestments, and looked with cordiality and approbation on the youths, whose hands and arms could indeed do much, and did it, but whose active eyes could rarely move upward the modester of their partners.

While the elder of the clergy were thus gathering the fruits of their liberal cares and paternal exhortations, some of the younger looked on with a tenderer sentiment, not unmingled with regret. Suddenly the bells ceased; the figure of the dance was broken; all hastened into the church; and many hands that joined on the green, met together at the font, and touched the brow reciprocally with its lustral waters, in soul-devotion.

After the service, and after a sermon a good church-hour in length to gratify him, enriched with compliments from all authors, christian and pagan, informing him at the conclusion that, although he had been crowned in the capital, he must die, being born mortal, Ser Francesco rode homeward. The sermon seemed to have sunk deeply into him, and even into the horse under him, for both of them nodded, both snorted, and one stumbled. Simplizio was twice fain to cry,

"Ser Canonico! Riverenza! in this country

if we sleep before dinner it does us harm. There are stones in the road, Ser Canonico, loose as eggs in a nest, and pretty nigh as thick together, huge as mountains."

"God lad!" said Ser Francesco, rubbing his eyes, "toss the biggest of them out of the way, and never mind the rest."

The horse, although he walked, shuffled almost into an amble as he approached the stable, and his master looked up at it with nearly the same contentment. Assunta had been ordered to wait for his return, and cried,

"O Ser Francesco! you are looking at our long apricot, that runs the whole length of the stable and barn, covered with blossoms as the old white hen is with feathers. You must come in the summer, and eat this fine fruit with Signor Padrone. You cannot think how ruddy and golden and sweet and mellow it is. There are peaches in all the fields, and plums, and pears, and apples, but there is not another apricot for miles and miles. Ser Giovanni brought

the stone from Naples before I was born: a lady gave it to him when she had eaten only half the fruit off it: but perhaps you may have seen her, for you have ridden as far as Rome, or beyond. Padrone looks often at the fruit, and eats it willingly; and I have seen him turn over the stones in his plate, and choose one out from the rest, and put it into his pocket, but never plant it."

"Where is the youth?" inquired Ser Francesco.

"Gone away," answered the maiden.

"I wanted to thank him," said the Canonico.

"May I tell him so?" asked she.

"And give him," continued he, holding a piece of silver. . .

I will give him something of my own, if he goes on and behaves well," said she: "but Signor Padrone would drive him away for ever, I am sure, if he were tempted in an evil hour to accept a quatrino, for any service he could render the friends of the house."

Ser Francesco was delighted with the graceful animation of this ingenuous girl, and asked her, with a little curiosity, how she could afford to make him a present.

"I do not intend to make him a present," she replied: "but it is better he should be rewarded by me," she blushed and hesitated, "or by Signor Padrone," she added, "than by your Reverence. He has not done half his duty yet; not half. I will teach him: he is quite a child; four months younger than me."

Ser Francesco went into the house, saying to himself at the door way,

"Truth, innocence, and gentle manners, have not yet left the earth. There are sermons that never make the ears weary. I have heard but few of them, and come from church for this."

Whether Simplizio had obeyed some private signal from Assunta, or whether his own delicacy had prompted him to disappear, he was now again in the stable, and the manger was replenished with hay. A bucket was soon after

heard ascending from the well; and then two words, *Thanks, Simplizio.*"

When Petrarca entered the chamber, he found Boccaccio with his breviary in his hand, not looking into it indeed, but repeating a thanksgiving in an audible and impassioned tone of voice. Seeing Ser Francesco, he laid the book down beside him, and welcomed him.

"I hope you have an appetite after your ride," said he, "for you have sent home a good dinner before you."

Ser Francesco did not comprehend him, and expressed it not in words but in looks.

"I am afraid you will dine sadly late to-day: noon has struck this half-hour, and you must wait another, I doubt. However, by good luck, I had a couple of citrons in the house, intended to assuage my thirst if the fever had continued. This being over, by God's mercy, I will try (please God!) whether we two greyhounds cannot be a match for a leveret."

"How is this?" said Ser Francesco.

"Young Marc-Antonio Grilli, the cleverest lad in the parish at noosing any wild animal, is our patron of the feast. He has wanted for many a day to say something in the ear of Matilda Vercelli. Bringing up the leveret to my bedside, and opening the lips, and cracking the knuckles, and turning the foot round to show the quality and quantity of the hair upon it, and to prove that it really and truly was a leveret, and might be eaten without offence to my teeth, he informed me that he had left his mother in the yard, ready to dress it for me; she having been cook to the prior. He protested he owed the *crowned martyr* a forest of leverets, boars, deer, and everything else within them, for having commanded the most backward girls to dance directly. Whereupon he darted forth at Matilda, saying, 'The *crowned martyr* orders it,' seizing both her hands, and swinging her round before she knew what she was about. He soon had an opportunity of applying a word, no doubt as dexterously as hand or foot; and

she said submissively, but seriously, and almost sadly, 'Marc-Antonio, now all the people have seen it, they will think it.'

" And, after a pause,

" 'I am quite ashamed: and so should you be: are not you now?'

" The others had run into the church. Matilda, who scarcely had noticed it, cried suddenly,

" 'O Santissima! we are quite alone."

" 'Will you be mine?' cried he, enthusiastically.

" 'O! they will hear you in the church,' replied she.

" 'They shall, they shall,' cried he again, as loudly.

" 'If you will only go away.'

" 'And then?'

" 'Yes, yes, indeed.'

" 'The Virgin hears you: fifty saints are witnesses.'

" 'Ah! they know you made me: they will look kindly on us.'

"He released her hand: she ran into the church, doubling her veil (I will answer for her) at the door, and kneeling as near it as she could find a place.

"'By St. Peter,' said Marc Antonio, 'if there is a leveret in the wood, the *crowned martyr* shall dine upon it this blessed day.' And he bounded off, and set about his occupation. I inquired what induced him to designate you by such a title. He answered, that everybody knew you had received the crown of martyrdom at Rome, between the pope and antipope, and had performed many miracles, for which they had canonized you, and that you wanted only to die to become a saint."

The leveret was now served up, cut into small pieces, and covered with a rich tenacious sauce, composed of sugar, citron, and various spices. The appetite of Ser Francesco was contagious. Never was dinner more enjoyed by two companions, and never so much by a greater number. One glass of a fragrant wine, the colour of

honey, and unmixt with water, crowned the repast. Ser Francesco then went into his own chamber, and found, on his ample mattress, a cool refreshing sleep, quite sufficient to remove all the fatigues of the morning; and Ser Giovanni lowered the pillow against which he had seated himself, and fell into his usual repose. Their separation was not of long continuance: and, the religious duties of the Sabbath having been performed, a few reflections on literature were no longer interdicted.

BOCCACCIO.

How happens it, O Francesco! that nearly at the close of our lives, after all our efforts and exhortations, we are standing quite alone in the extensive fields of literature? We are only like to *scoria* struck from the anvil of the gigantic Dante. We carry our fire along with us in our parabola, and, behold! it falls extinguished on the earth.

PETRARCA.

Courage! courage! we have hardly yet lighted the lamp and shown the way.

BOCCACCIO.

You are a poet; I am only a commentator, and must soothe my own failures in the success of my master.

I cannot but think again and again, how fruitlessly the bravest have striven to perpetuate the ascendency or to establish the basis of empire, when Alighieri hath fixed a language for thousands of years, and for myriads of men; a language far richer and more beautiful than our glorious Italy ever knew before, in any of her regions, since the attic and the dorian contended for the prize of eloquence on her southern shores. Eternal honour, eternal veneration, to him who raised up our country from the barbarism that surrounded her! Remember how short a time before him, his master Brunetto Latini wrote in french; prose indeed; but

whatever has enough in it for poetry, has enough for prose out of its shreds and selvages.

PETRARCA.

Brunetto! Brunetto! it was not well done in thee. An Italian, a poet, write in french! What human ear can tolerate its nasty nasalities? what homely intellect be satisfied with its bare-bone poverty? By good fortune we have nothing to do with it in the course of our examination. Several things in Dante himself you will find more easy to explain than to excuse. You have already given me a specimen of them, which I need not assist you in rendering more copious.

BOCCACCIO.

There are certainly some that require no little circumspection. Difficult as they are to excuse, the difficulty lies more on the side of the clergy than the laity.

PETRARCA.

I understand you. The *gergo* of your author

has always a reference to the court of the Vatican. Here he speaks in the dark: against his private enemies he always is clear and explicit.

Unless you are irresistibly prest into it, give no more than two, or at most three lectures, on the verse which, I predict, will appear to our Florentines the cleverest in the poem.

Che vel viso degli uomini legge O M O.

BOCCACCIO.

We were very near a new civil war about the interpretation of it.

PETRARCA.

Foolisher questions have excited general ones. What, I wonder, rendered you all thus reasonable at last?

BOCCACCIO.

The majority, which on few occasions is so much in the right, agreed with me that the two eyes are signified by the two vowels, the nose by the centre of the consonant, and the temples by its exterior lines.

PETRARCA.

In proceeding to explore the Paradise more minutely, I must caution you against remarking to your audience, that, although the nose is between the eyes, the temples are not, exactly. An observation, which, if well established, might be resented as somewhat injurious to the *Divinity* of the *Commedia.*

BOCCACCIO.

With all its flatnesses and swamps, many have preferred the *Paradiso* to the other two sections of the poem.

PETRARCA.

There is as little in it of very bad poetry, or we may rather say, as little of what is no poetry at all, as in either, which are uninviting from an absolute lack of interest and illusion, from the confusedness of the ground-work, the indistinctness of the scene, and for the paltriness (in great measure) of the agents. If we are amazed at the number of latin verses in the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, what must we be at their ferti-

lity in the *Paradiso*, where they drop on us in ripe clusters through every glen and avenue! We reach the conclusion of the sixteenth canto before we come in sight of poetry, or more than a glade with a gleam upon it. Here we find a description of Florence in her age of innocence: but the scourge of satire sounds in our ears before we fix the attention.

BOCCACCIO.

I like the old Ghibelline best in the seventeenth, where he dismisses the doctors, corks up the latin, ceases from psalmody, looses the arms of Calfucci and Arigucci, sets down Caponsacco in the market, and gives us a stave of six verses which repays us amply for our heaviest toils and sufferings.

Tu lascierai ogni cosa diletta, &c.

But he soon grows weary of tenderness and sick of sorrow, and returns to his habitual exercise of throwing stones and calling names.

Again we are refreshed in the twentieth. Here we come to the simily: here we look up

and see his lark, and are happy and lively as herself. Too soon the hard fingers of the master are round our wrists again: we are dragged into the school, and are obliged to attend the divinity-examination, which the poet undergoes from Saint Simon-Peter. He acquits himself pretty well, and receives a handsome compliment from the questioner, who, "*inflamed with love,*" acknowledges he has given "*a good account of the coinage, both in regard to weight and alloy.*"

"Tell me," continues he, "have you any of it in your pocket?"

"Yea," replies the scholar, "and so shining and round that I doubt not what mint it comes from."

Saint Simon-Peter does not take him at his word for it, but tries to puzzle and pose him with several hard queries. He answers both warily and wittily, and grows so contented with his examining master, that, instead of calling

him "*a sergeant of infantry,*" as he did before, he now entitles him "*the baron.*"

I must consult our bishop ere I venture to comment on these two verses,

Credo una essenza, si una e si trina
Che sofferà congiunto *sunt et este.*

as, whatever may peradventure lie within them, they are hardly worth the ceremony of being burnt alive for, although it should be at the expense of the Church.

PETRARCA.

I recommend to you the straightforward course; but I believe I must halt a little, and advise you to look about you. If you let people see that there are so many faults in your author, they will reward you, not according to your merits, but according to its defects. On celebrated writers, when we speak in public, it is safer to speak magnificently than correctly. Therefore be not too cautious in leading your disciples, and in telling them, here you may step

securely, here you must mind your footing: for a florin will drop out of your pocket at every such crevice you stop to cross.

BOCCACCIO.

The room is hardly light enough to let me see whether you are smiling: but, being the most ingenuous soul alive, and by no means the least jocose one, I suspect it. My office is, to explain what is difficult, rather than to expatiate on what is beautiful, or to investigate what is amiss. If those who invite me to read the lectures, mark out the topics for me, nothing is easier than to keep within them. Yet with how true and entire a pleasure shall I point out to my fellow-citizens such a glorious tract of splendour as there is in the single line,

> Cio ch'io vedevo mi sembrava un riso
> Dell' universo!

With what exultation shall I toss up my gauntlet into the balcony of proud Antiquity, and cry, *Descend! Contend!*

I have frequently heard your admiration of

this passage, and therefore I dwell on it the more delighted. Beside, we seldom find anything in our progress that is not apter to excite a very different sensation. School-divinity can never be made attractive to the Muses; nor will Virgil and Thomas Aquinas ever cordially shake hands. The unrelenting rancour against the popes is more tedious than unmerited: in a poem I doubt whether we would not rather find it unmerited than tedious. For, of all the sins against the spirit of poetry, this is the most unpardonable. Something of our indignation, and a proportion of our scorn, may fairly be detached from the popes, and thrown on the pusillanimous and perfidious who suffered such excrescences to shoot up, exhausting and poisoning the soil they sprang from.

PETRARCA.

I do not wonder they make Saint Peter "redden," as we hear they do, but I regret that they make him stammer,

Quegli che usurpa in terra il luogo mio,
Il luogo mio, il luogo mio, &c.

Alighieri was not the first catholic who taught us that the papacy is usurpation, nor will he be (let us earnestly hope) the last to inculcate so evident a doctrine.

BOCCACCIO.

Canonico of Parma! Canonico of Parma! you make my hair stand on end. But since nobody sees it beside yourself, prythee tell me how it happens that an infallible pope should denounce as damnable the decision of another infallible pope, his immediate predecessor? Giovanni the twenty-second, whom you knew intimately, taught us that the souls of the just could not enjoy the sight of God until after the day of universal judgment. But the doctors of theology at Paris, and those learned and competent clerks, the kings of France and Naples, would not allow him to die before he had swallowed the choak-pear they could not chew. The succeeding pope, who called himself an ass, in which infallibility was less wounded, and neither king nor doctor carped at it (for not

only was he one, but as truth-telling a beast as Balaam's) condemned this error, as indeed well he might, after two kings had set their faces against it. But on the whole, the thing is ugly and perplexing. That they were both infallible we know; and yet they differed! Nay, the former differed from himself, and was pope all the while; of course infallible! Well, since we may not solve the riddle, let us suppose it is only a mystery the more, and be thankful for it.

PETRARCA.

That is best.

BOCCACCIO.

I never was one of those who wish for ice to slide upon in summer. Being no theologian, I neither am nor desire to be sharp-sighted in articles of heresy: but it is reported that there are among Christians some who hesitate to worship the Virgin.

PETRARCA.

Few, let us hope.

BOCCACCIO.

Hard hearts! Imagine her, in her fifteenth year, fondling the lovely babe whom she was destined to outlive! destined to see shedding his blood, and bowing his head in agony. Can we ever pass her by and not say from our hearts,

"O thou whose purity had only the stain of compassionate tears upon it! blessings, blessings on thee!"

I never saw her image but it suspended my steps on the highway of the world, discoursed with me, softened and chastened me, showing me too clearly my unworthiness by the light of a reproving smile.

PETRARCA.

Woe betide those who cut off from us any source of tenderness, and shut out from any of our senses the access to devotion!

Beatrice, in the place before us, changes colour too, as deeply as ever she did on earth; for Saint Paul, in his passion, picks up and flourishes some very filthy words. He does

not recover the use of his reason on a sudden; but, after a long and bitter complaint that faith and innocence are only to be found in little children, and that the child, moreover, who loves and listens to its mother while it lisps, wishes to see her buried when it can speak plainly, he informs us that this corruption ought to excite no wonder, since the human race must of necessity go astray, not having any one upon earth to govern it.

BOCCACCIO.

Is not this strange, though, from the mouth of one inspired? We are taught that there never shall be wanting a head to govern the church; could Saint Paul say that it *was* wanting? I feel my catholicism here touched to the quick. However, I am resolved not to doubt: the more difficulties I find, the fewer questions I raise; the saints must settle it, as well as they can, among themselves.

PETRARCA.

They are nearer the fountain of truth than

we are; and I am confident Saint Paul was in the right.

BOCCACCIO.

I do verily believe he may have been, although at Rome we might be in jeopardy for saying it. Well is it for me that my engagement is to comment on Alighieri's *Divina Commedia*, instead of his treatise *De Monarchia.* He says bold things there, and sets apostles and popes together by the ears. That is not the worst. He would destroy what is and should be, and would establish what never can nor ought to be.

PETRARCA.

If a universal monarch could make children good universally, and keep them as innocent when they grow up as when they were in the cradle, we might wish him upon his throne to-morrow. But Alighieri, and those others who have conceived such a prodigy, seem to be unaware that what they would establish for the sake of unity, is the very thing by which this

unity must be demolished. For, since universal power does not confer on its possessor universal intelligence, and since a greater number of the cunning could and would assemble round him, he must (if we suppose him like the majority and nearly the totality of his class) appoint a greater proportion of such subjects to the management and control of his dominions. Many of them would become the rulers of cities and of provinces in which they have no connexions or affinities, and in which the preservation of character is less desirable to them than the possession of power. The operations of injustice, and the opportunities of improvement, would be alike concealed from the monarch in the remoter parts of his territories; and every man of high station would exercise more authority than he.

BOCCACCIO.

Casting aside the impracticable scheme of universal monarchy, if kings and princes there must be, even in the midst of civility and let-

ters, why cannot they return to European customs, renouncing those Asiatic practices which are become enormously prevalent? why cannot they be contented with such power as the kings of Rome and the lucumons of Etruria were contented with? But forsooth they are wiser! and such customs are obsolete! Of their wisdom I shall venture to say nothing, for nothing, I believe, is to be said of it, but the customs are not obsolete in other countries. They have taken deep root in the north, and exhibit the signs of vigour and vitality. Unhappily, the weakest men always think they least want help; like the mad and the drunk. Princes and geese are fond of standing on one leg, and fancy it (no doubt) a position of gracefulness and security, until the cramp seizes them on a sudden: then they find how helpless they are, and how much better it would have been if they had employed all the support at their disposal.

PETRARCA.

When the familiars of absolute princes taunt us, as they are wont to do, with the only apophthegm they ever learnt by heart, namely, that it is better to be ruled by one master than by many, I quite agree with them; unity of power being the principle of republicanism, while the principle of despotism is division and delegation. In the one system, every man conducts his own affairs, either personally or through the agency of some trust-worthy representative, which is essentially the same: in the other system, no man, in quality of citizen, has any affairs of his own to conduct: but a tutor has been as much set over him as over a lunatic, as little with his option or consent, and without any provision, as there is in the case of the lunatic, for returning reason. Meanwhile, the spirit of republics is omnipresent in them, as active in the particles as in the mass, in the circumference as in the centre. Eternal it

must be, as truth and justice are, although not stationary. Yet when we look on Venice and Genoa, on the turreted Pisa and our own fair Florence, and many smaller cities self-poised in high serenity; when we see what edifices they have raised, and then glance at the wretched habitations of the slaves around, the Austrians, the French, and other fierce restless barbarians, difficult is it to believe that the beneficent God, who smiled upon these our labours, will ever in his indignation cast them down, a helpless prey to such invaders.

Morals and happiness will always be nearest to perfection in small communities, where functionaries are appointed by as numerous a body as can be brought together of the industrious and intelligent, who have observed in what manner they superintend their families, and converse with their equals and dependents. Do we find that farms are better cultivated for being large? is your neighbour friendlier for being powerful? is your steward honester and

more attentive for having a mortgage on your estate or a claim to a joint property in your mansion? Yet well-educated men are seen about the streets, so vacant and delirious, as to fancy that a country can only be well governed by somebody who never saw and will never see a twentieth part of it, or know a hundredth part of its necessities; somebody who has no relationships in it, no connexions, no remembrances. A man without soul and sympathy is alone to be the governor of men! Giovanni! our Florentines are, beyond all others, a treacherous, tricking, mercenary race. What in the name of heaven will become of them, if ever they listen to these ravings; if ever they lose, by their cowardice and dissensions, the crust of salt that keeps them from putrescency, their freedom?

BOCCACCIO.

Alas! I dare hardly look out sometimes, lest I see before me the day when German and Spaniard will split them down the back and

throw them upon the coals. Sad thought! here we will have done with it. We cannot help them: we have made the most of them, like the good tailor who, as Dante says, cuts his coat according to his cloth.

PETRARCA.

Do you intend, if they should call upon you again, to give them occasionally some of your strictures on his prose writings?

BOCCACCIO.

It would not be expedient. Enough of his political sentiments is exhibited, in various places of his poem, to render him unacceptable to one party; and enough of his theological, or rather his ecclesiastical, to frighten both. You and I were never passionately fond of the papacy, to which we trace in great measure the miseries of our Italy, its divisions and its corruptions, the substitution of cunning for fortitude, and of creed for conduct. He burst into indignation at the sight of this, and, because the popes took away our christianity, he was so

angry he would throw her freedom after it. Any thorn in the way is fit enough to toss the tattered rag on. A German king will do; Austrian or Bavarian, Swabian or Switzer. And, to humiliate us more and more, and render us the laughing-stock of our household, he would invest the intruder with the title of Roman emperor. What! it is not enough then that he assumes it! We must invite him, forsooth, to accept it at our hands!

PETRARCA.

Let the other nations of Europe be governed by their hereditary kings and feudal princes: it is more accordant with those ancient habits which have not yet given way to the blandishment of literature and the pacific triumph of the arts: but let the states of Italy be guided by their own citizens. May nations find out by degrees that the next evil to being conquered is to conquer, and that he who assists in making slaves gives over at last by becoming one.

BOCCACCIO.

Let us endure a French pope, or any other, as well as we can; there is no novelty in his being a stranger. The Romans at all times picked up recruits from the thieves, gods, and priests, of all nations. Dante is wrong, I suspect, in imagining the popes to be infidels: and, no doubt, they would pay for indulgences as honestly as they sell them, if there were anybody at hand to receive the money. But who in the world ever thought of buying the cap he was wearing on his own head? Popes are no such triflers. After all, an infidel pope (and I do not believe there are three in a dozen,) is less noxious than a sanguinary soldier, be his appellation what it may, if his power is only limited by his will. My experience has however taught me, that where there is a great mass of power concentrated, it will always act with great influence on the secondary around it. Whether pope or emperor, or native king, occupy the most authority

within the Alps, the barons will range themselves under his banner, apart from the citizens. Venice, who appears to have received by succession the political wisdom of republican Rome, has less political enterprise: and the jealousies of her rivals will always hold them back, or greatly check them, from any plan suggested by her for the general good.

PETRARCA.

It appears to be the will of Providence that power and happiness shall never co-exist. Whenever a state becomes powerful, it becomes unjust; and injustice leads it first to the ruin of others, and next, and speedily, to its own. We, whose hearts are republican, are dazzled by looking so long and so intently at the eagles, and standards, and golden letters, S. P. Q. R. We are reluctant to admit that the most wretched days of ancient Rome were the days of her most illustrious men; that they began amidst the triumphs of Scipio, when the Gracchi perished, and reached the worst under the

dictatorship of Cæsar, when perished Liberty herself. A milder and better race was gradually formed by Grecian instruction. Vespasian, Titus, Nerva, Trajan, the Antonines, the Gordians, Tacitus, Probus, in an almost unbroken series, are such men as never wore the diadem in other countries; and Rome can show nothing comparable to them in the most renowned and virtuous of her earlier consuls. Humanity would be consoled in some degree by them, if their example had sunk into the breasts of the governed. But ferocity is unsoftened by sensuality; and the milk of the wolf could always be traced in the veins of the effeminated Romans.

PETRARCA.

That is true: and they continue to this day less humane than any other people of Italy. The better part of their character has fallen off from them; and in courage and perseverance they are far behind the Venetians and Ligurians. These last, a scanty population, were hardly to be conquered by Rome in the pleni-

tude of her power, and with all her confederates: for which reason they were hated by her beyond all other nations. To gratify the pride and malice of Augustus, were written the verses,

> Vane Ligur! frustraque animis elate superbis,
> Nequicquam patrias tentasti lubricus artes.

Since that time, the inhabitants of Genoa and Venice have been enriched with the generous blood of the Lombards. This little tribe on the Subalpine territory, and the Norman on the Apulian, demonstrate to us, by the rapidity and extension of their conquests, that Italy is an over-ripe fruit, ready to drop from the stalk under the feet of the first insect that alights on it.

BOCCACCIO.

The Germans, although as ignorant as the French, are less cruel, less insolent and rapacious. The French have a separate claw for every object of appetite or passion, and a spring that enables them to seize it. The desires of the German are overlaid with food and extin-

guished with drink, which to others are stimulants and incentives. The German loves to see everything about him orderly and entire, however coarse and common: the nature of the Frenchman is to derange and destroy everything. Sometimes when he has done so, he will reconstruct and refit it in his own manner, slenderly and fantastically; oftener leaving it in the middle, and proposing to lay the foundation when he has pointed the pinnacles and gilt the weathercock.

PETRARCA.

There is no danger that the French will ever have a durable footing in this or any other country. Their levity is more intolerable than German pressure, their arrogance than German pride, their falsehood than German rudeness, and their vexations than German exaction.

BOCCACCIO.

If I must be devoured, I have little choice between the bear and the panther. May we always see the creatures at a distance and across

the grating. The French will fondle us, to show us how vastly it is our interest to fondle them; watching all the while their opportunity; looking mild and half asleep; making a dash at last; and laying bare and fleshless the arm we extend to them, from shoulder-blade to wrist.

PETRARCA.

No nation, grasping at so much, ever held so little, or lost so soon what it had inveigled. Yet France is surrounded by smaller and by apparently weaker states, which she never ceases to molest and invade. Whatever she has won, and whatever she has lost, has been alike won and lost by her perfidy; the characteristic of the people from the earliest ages, and recorded by a succession of historians, Greek and Roman.

BOCCACCIO.

My father spent many years among them, where also my education was completed; yet whatever I have seen, I must acknowledge, corresponds with whatever I have read, and corroborates, in my mind, the testimony of tradition.

Their ancient history is only a preface to their later. Deplorable as is the condition of Italy, I am more contented to share in her sufferings than in the frothy festivities of her frisky neighbour.

PETRARCA.

So am I: but we must never deny or dissemble the victories of the ancient Gauls, many traces of which are remaining; not that a nation's glory is the greener for the ashes it has scattered in the season of its barbarism.

BOCCACCIO.

The Cisalpine regions were indeed both invaded and occupied by them; yet, from inability to retain the acquisition, how inconsiderable a part of the population is Gaulish! Long before the time of Cæsar, the language was latin throughout: the soldiers of Marius swept away the last dregs and stains on the ancient hearth. Nor is there in the physiognomy of the people the slightest indication of the Gaul, as we perceive by medals and marbles. These would surely

preserve his features; because they can only be the memorials of the higher orders, which of course would have descended from the conquerors. They merged early and totally in the original mass: and the countenances in Cisalpine busts are as beautiful and dignified as our other Italian races.

PETRARCA.

The French imagine theirs are too.

BOCCACCIO.

I heartily wish them the full enjoyment of their blessings, real or imaginary: but neither their manners nor their principles coincide with ours, nor can a reasonable hope be entertained of benefit in their alliance. Union at home is all we want, and vigilance to perpetuate the better of our institutions.

PETRARCA.

The land, O Giovanni, of your early youth, the land of my only love, fascinates us no longer. Italy is our country; and not ours only, but every man's, wherever may have been his wan-



derings, wherever may have been his birth, who watches with anxiety the recovery of the Arts, and acknowledges the supremacy of Genius. Beside, it is in Italy at last that all our few friends are resident. Yours were left behind you at Paris in your adolescence, if indeed any friendship can exist between a Florentine and a Frenchman: mine, at Avignon, were Italians, and older, for the most part, than myself. Here we know that we are beloved by some, and esteemed by many, It indeed gave me pleasure the first morning as I lay in bed, to overhear the fondness and earnestness which a worthy priest was expressing in your behalf.

BOCCACCIO.

In mine?

PETRARCA.

Yes indeed: what wonder?

BOCCACCIO.

A worthy priest?

PETRARCA.

None else, certainly.

BOCCACCIO.

Heard in bed! dreaming, dreaming; ay?

PETRARCA.

No indeed: my eyes and ears were wide open.

BOCCACCIO.

The little parlour opens into your room. But what priest could that be? Canonico Casini? He only comes when we have a roast of thrushes, or some such small matter at table: and this is not the season; they are pairing. Plover eggs might tempt him hitherward. If he heard a plover he would not be easy, and would fain make her drop her oblation before she had settled her nest.

PETRARCA.

It is right and proper that you should be informed who the clergyman was, to whom you are under an obligation.

BOCCACCIO.

Tell me something about it, for truly I am at a loss to conjecture.

PETRARCA.

He must unquestionably have been expressing a kind and ardent solicitude for your eternal welfare. The first words I heard on awakening were these:

" *Ser Giovanni, although the best of masters, ...*"

BOCCACCIO.

Those were Assuntina's.

PETRARCA.

... " *may hardly be quite so holy (not being priest or friar) as your Reverence.*"

She was interrupted by the question, " *What conversation holdeth he?*"

She answered,

" *He never talks of loving our neighbour with all our heart, all our soul, and all our strength, although he often gives away the last loaf in the pantry.*"

BOCCACCIO.

It was she! Why did she say that, the slut!

PETRARCA.

" *He doth well,*" replied the confessor.

"Of the church, of the brotherhood, that is, of me, what discourses holdeth he?"

I thought the question an indiscreet one; but confessors vary in their advances to the seat of truth.

She proceeded to answer:

"He never said anything about the power of the church to absolve us, if we should happen to go astray a little in good company, like your Reverence."

Here, it is easy to perceive, is some slight ambiguity. Evidently she meant to say, by the seduction of "*bad*" company, and to express that his Reverence had asserted his power of absolution; which is undeniable.

BOCCACCIO.

I have my version.

PETRARCA.

What may yours be?

BOCCACCIO.

Frate Biagio; broad as daylight; the whole frock round!

I would wager a flask of oil against a turnip, that he laid another trap for a penance. Let us see how he went on. I warrant, as he warmed, he left off limping in his paces, and bore hard upon the bridle.

PETRARCA.

"*Much do I fear,*" continued the expositor, "*he never spoke to thee, child, about another world.*"

There was a silence of some continuance.

"*Speak!*" said the confessor.

"*No, indeed, he never did, poor Padrone!*' was the slow and evidently reluctant avowal of the maiden; for, in the midst of the acknowledgment her sighs came through the crevices of the door: but then, without any farther interrogation, and with little delay, she added,

"*But he often makes this look like it.*"

BOCCACCIO.

And now, if he had carried a holy scourge, it would not have been on his shoulders that he would have laid it.

PETRARCA.

Zeal carries men often too far afloat; and confessors in general wish to have the sole steerage of the conscience. When she told him that your benignity made this world another heaven, he warmly and sharply answered,

"*It is only we who ought to do that.*"

"*Hush,*" said the maiden; and I verily believe she, at that moment, set her back against the door, to prevent the sounds from coming through the crevices, for the rest of them seemed to be just over my night-cap. "*Hush,*" said she, in the whole length of that softest of all articulations, "*There is Ser Francesco in the next room: he sleeps long into the morning, but he is so clever a clerk, he may understand you just the same. I doubt whether he thinks Ser Giovanni in the wrong for making so many people quite happy; and if he should, it would grieve me very much to think he blamed Ser Giovanni.*"

"*Who is Ser Francesco?*" he asked, in a low voice.

"*Ser Canonico,*" she answered.

"*Of what Duomo?*" continued he.

"*Who knows?*" was the reply; "*but he is Padrone's heart's friend, for certain.*"

"*Cospetto di Bacco! It can then be no other than Petrarca. He makes rhymes and love like the devil. Don't listen to him, or you are undone. Does he love you, too, as well as Padrone?*" he asked, still lowering his voice.

"*I cannot tell that matter,*" she answered, somewhat impatiently: "*but I love him.*"

"*To my face!*" cried he, smartly.

"*To the Santissima!*" replied she, instantaneously; "*for have not I told your Reverence he is Padrone's true heart's friend!*"

"*And are not you my confessor, when you come on purpose?*"

"*True, true!*" answered he: "*but there are occasions when we are shocked by the confession, and wish it made less daringly*"

"*I was bold; but who can help loving him who loves my good Padrone?*" said she, much more submissively.

BOCCACCIO.

Brave girl, for that!

Dog of a Frate! They are all of a kidney; all of a kennel. I would dilute their meal well and keep them low. They should not waddle and wallop in every hollow lane, nor loll out their watery tongues at every wash-pool in the parish. We shall hear, I trust, no more about Fra Biagio in the house while you are with us. Ah! were it then for life.

PETRARCA.

The man's prudence may be reasonably doubted, but it were uncharitable to question his sincerity. Could a neighbour, a religious one in particular, be indifferent to the welfare of Boccaccio, or any belonging to him?

BOCCACCIO.

I do not complain of his indifference. Indifferent! no, not he. He might as well be, though. My Viletta here is my castle: it was my father's; it was his father's. Cowls did not hang to dry upon the same cord with caps in their *podere*; they shall not in mine. The

girl is an honest girl, Francesco, though I say it. Neither she nor any other shall be befooled and bamboozled under my roof. Methinks Holy Church might contrive some improvement upon confession.

PETRARCA.

Hush! Giovanni! But, it being a matter of discipline, who knows but she might.

BOCCACCIO.

Discipline! ay, ay, ay! faith and troth there are some who want it.

PETRARCA.

You really terrify me. These are sad surmises.

BOCCACCIO.

Sad enough: but I am keeper of my handmaiden's probity.

PETRARCA.

It could not be kept safer.

BOCCACCIO.

I wonder what the Frate would be putting into her head.

PETRARCA.

Nothing, nothing; be assured.

BOCCACCIO.

Why did he ask her all those questions?

PETRARCA.

Confessors do occasionally take circuitous ways to arrive at the secrets of the human heart.

BOCCACCIO.

And sometimes they drive at it, methinks, a whit too directly. He had no business to make remarks about me.

PETRARCA.

Anxiety.

BOCCACCIO.

'Fore God, Giovanni, he shall have more of that; for I will shut him out the moment I am up again and stirring, though he stand but a nose's length off. I have no fear about the girl; no suspicion of her. He might whistle to the moon on a frosty night, and expect as reasonably her descending. Never was a man so

entirely at his ease as I am about that; never, never. She is adamant; a bright sword now first unscabbarded; no breath can hang about it. A seal of beryl, of chrysolite, of ruby; to make impressions, (all in good time and proper place though,) and receive none: incapable, just as they are, of splitting, or cracking, or flawing, or harbouring dirt. Let him mind that. Such, I assure you, is that poor little wench, Assuntina.

PETRARCA.

I am well convinced that so well-behaved a young creature as Assunta...

BOCCACCIO.

Right! Assunta is her name by baptism; we usually call her Assuntina, because she is slender, and scarcely yet full-grown, perhaps: but who can tell?

As for those friars, I never was a friend to impudence: I hate loose suggestions. In girls' minds you will find little dust but what is carried there by gusts from without. They seldom

want sweeping; when they do, the broom should be taken from behind the house-door, and the master should be the sacristan.

Scarcely were these words uttered when Assunta was heard running up the stairs; and the next moment she rapped. Being ordered to come in, she entered with a willow twig in her hand, from the middle of which willow twig (for she held the two ends together) hung a fish, shining with green and gold.

"What hast there, young maiden?" said Ser Francesco.

"A fish, Riverenza!" answered she. In Tuscany we call it *tinca*.

PETRARCA.

I too am a little of a Tuscan.

ASSUNTA.

Indeed! well, you really speak very like one, but only more sweetly and slowly. I wonder how you can keep up with Signor Padrone, he talks fast when he is in health; and you have made him so. Why did not you come before?

Your Reverence has surely been at Certaldo in time past.

PETRARCA.

Yes, before thou wert born.

ASSUNTA.

Ah, sir! it must have been long ago, then.

PETRARCA.

Thou hast just entered upon life.

ASSUNTA.

I am no child.

PETRARCA.

What then art thou?

ASSUNTA.

I know not: I have lost both father and mother; there is a name for such as I am.

PETRARCA.

And a place in heaven.

BOCCACCIO.

Who brought us that fish, Assunta? hast paid for it? there must be seven pounds: I never saw the like.

ASSUNTA.

I could hardly lift up my apron to my eyes with it in my hand. Luca, who brought it all the way from the Padule, could scarcely be entreated to eat a morsel of bread or sit down.

BOCCACCIO.

Give him a flask or two of our wine; he will like it better than the sour puddle of the plain.

ASSUNTA.

He is gone back.

BOCCACCIO.

Gone! who is he, pray?

ASSUNTA.

Luca, to be sure.

BOCCACCIO.

What Luca?

ASSUNTA.

Dominedio! O Riverenza! how sadly must Ser Giovanni, my poor padrone, have lost his memory in this cruel long illness! he cannot

recollect young Luca of the Bientola, who married Maria.

BOCCACCIO.

I never heard of either, to the best of my knowledge.

ASSUNTA.

Be pleased to mention this in your prayers to-night, Ser Canonico! May our lady soon give him back his memory! and everything else she has been pleased (only in play, I hope) to take away from him! Ser Francesco, you must have heard all over the world how Maria Gargarelli, who lived in the service of our paroco, somehow was outwitted by Satanasso. Monsignore thought the paroco had not done all he might have done against his wiles and craftiness, and sent his Reverence over to the monastery in the mountains, Laverna yonder, to make him look sharp; and there he is yet.

And now does Signor Padrone recollect?

BOCCACCIO.

Rather more distinctly.

ASSUNTA.

Ah me! Rather more distinctly! have patience, Signor Padrone! I am too venturous, God help me! But, Riverenza, when Maria was the scorn or the abhorrence of everybody else, excepting poor Luca Sabbatini, who had always cherished her, and excepting Signor Padrone, who had never seen her in his lifetime.. for paroco Snello said he desired no visits from any who·took liberties with holy church.. as if Padrone did! Luca one day came to me out of breath, with money in his hand for our duck. Now it so happened that the duck, stuffed with noble chestnuts, was going to table at that instant. I told Signor Padrone.

BOCCACCIO.

Assunta, I never heard thee repeat so long and tiresome a story before, nor put thyself out of breath so. Come, we have had enough of it.

PETRARCA.

She is mortified: pray let her proceed.

BOCCACCIO.

As you will.

ASSUNTA.

I told Signor Padrone how Luca was lamenting that Maria was seized with an *imagination.*

PETRARCA.

No wonder then she fell into misfortune, and her neighbours and friends avoided her.

ASSUNTA.

Riverenza! how can you smile? Signor Padrone! and you too? You shook your head and sighed at it when it happened. The Demonio, who had caused all the first mischief, was not contented until he had given her the *imagination.*

PETRARCA.

He could not have finished his work more effectually.

ASSUNTA.

He was balked, however. Luca said,

"*She shall not die under her wrongs, please God!*"

I repeated the words to Signor Padrone... He seems to listen, Riverenza! and will remember presently... and Signor Padrone cut away one leg for himself, clean forgetting all the chestnuts inside, and said sharply, "Give the bird to Luca; and, hark ye, bring back the minestra."

Maria loved Luca with all her heart, and Luca loved Maria with all his: but they both hated paroco Snello for such neglect about the evil one. And even Monsignore, who sent for Luca on purpose, had some difficulty in persuading him to forbear from choler and discourse. For Luca, who never swears, swore bitterly that the devil should play no such tricks again, nor alight on girls napping in the parsonage. Monsignore thought he intended to take violent possession, and to keep watch there himself without consent of the incumbent.

"*I will have no scandal,*" said Monsignore; so there was none. Maria, though she did

indeed, as I told your Reverence, love her Luca dearly, yet she long refused to marry him, and cried very much at last on the wedding-day, and said, as she entered the porch,

"*Luca! it is not yet too late to leave me.*"

He would have kissed her, but her face was upon his shoulder.

Pievano Locatelli married them, and gave them his blessing: and going down from the altar, he said before the people, as he stood on the last step, "*Be comforted, child! be comforted! God above knows that thy husband is honest, and that thou art innocent.*" Pievano's voice trembled, for he was an aged and holy man, and had walked two miles on the occasion. Pulcheria, his governante, eighty years old, carried an apronful of lilies to bestrew the altar; and partly from the lilies, and partly from the blessed angels who (although invisible) were present, the church was filled with fragrance. Many who heretofore had been frightened at hearing the mention of Maria's name,

ventured now to walk up toward her; and some gave her needles, and some offered skeins of thread, and some ran home again for pots of honey.

BOCCACCIO.

And why didst not thou take her some trifle?

ASSUNTA.

I had none.

BOCCACCIO.

Surely there are always such about the premises.

ASSUNTA.

Not mine to give away.

BOCCACCIO.

So then at thy hands, Assunta, she went off not overladen. Ne'er a bone-bodkin out of thy bravery, ay?

ASSUNTA.

I ran out knitting, with the woodbine and syringa in the basket for the parlour. I made

the basket,.. I and... but myself chiefly, for boys are loiterers.

BOCCACCIO.

Well, well: why not bestow the basket, together with its rich contents?

ASSUNTA.

I am ashamed to say it.. I covered my half-stocking with them as quickly as I could, and ran after her, and presented it. Not knowing what was under the flowers, and never minding the liberty I had taken, being a stranger to her, she accepted it as graciously as possible, and bade me be happy.

PETRARCA.

I hope you have always kept her command.

ASSUNTA.

Nobody is ever unhappy here, excepting Fra Biagio, who frets sometimes: but that may be the walk; or he may fancy Ser Giovanni to be worse than he really is.

Having now performed her mission and concluded her narrative, she bowed, and said,

"Excuse me, Riverenza! excuse me, Signor Padrone! my arm aches with this great fish."

Then, bowing again, and moving her eyes modestly toward each, she added, "*with permission!*" and left the chamber.

"About the Sposina," after a pause began Ser Francesco: "about the Sposina, I do not see the matter clearly."

"You have studied too much for seeing all things clearly," answered Ser Giovanni: "you see only the greatest. In fine, the devil, on this count, is acquitted by acclamation: and the paroco Snello eats lettuce and chicory up yonder at Laverna. He has mendicant friars for his society every day; and snails, as pure as water can wash and boil them, for his repast on festivals. Under this discipline, if they keep it up, surely one devil out of legion will depart from him."

FOURTH DAY'S INTERVIEW.

PETRARCA.

Do not throw aside your *Paradiso* for me. Have you been reading it again so early?

BOCCACCIO.

Looking into it here and there. I had spare time before me.

PETRARCA.

You have coasted the whole poem, and your boat's bottom now touches ground. But tell me what you think of Beatrice.

BOCCACCIO.

I think her in general more of the seraphic doctor than of the seraph. It is well she re-

tained her beauty where she was, or she would scarcely be tolerable now and then. And yet, in other parts, we forget the captiousness in which Theology takes delight, and feel our bosoms refreshed by the perfect presence of the youthful and innocent Bice.

There is something so sweetly sanctifying in pure love!

PETRARCA.

Pure love? there is no other; nor shall be,
Till the worse angels hurl the better down
And heaven lie under hell: if God is one
And pure, so surely love is pure and one.

BOCCACCIO.

You understand it better than I do: you must have your own way.

Above all, I have been admiring the melody of the cadence in this portion of the *Divina Comedia*. Some of the stanzas leave us nothing to desire in facility and elegance.

Alighieri grows harmonious as he grows hu-

mane, and does not, like Orpheus, play the better with the beasts about him.

PETRARCA.

It is in Paradise that we might expect his tones to be tried and moderated.

BOCCACCIO.

None of the imitative arts should repose on writhings and distortions. Tragedy herself, unless she lead from Terror to Pity, has lost her way.

PETRARCA.

What then must be thought of a long and crowded work, whence Pity is violently excluded, and where Hatred is the first personage we meet, and almost the last we part from?

BOCCACCIO.

Happily the poet has given us here a few breezes of the morning, a few glimpses of the stars, a few similies of objects to which we have been accustomed among the amusements or occupations of the country. Some of them would be less admired in a meaner author, and are

welcome here chiefly as a variety and relief to the mind, after a long continuance in a painful posture. Have you not frequently been pleased with a short quotation of verses in themselves but indifferent, from finding them in some tedious dissertation? and especially if they carry you forth a little into the open air.

PETRARCA.

I am not quite certain whether, if the verses were indifferent, I should willingly exchange the prose for them; bad prose being less wearisome than bad poetry: so much less indeed, that the advantage of the exchange might fail to balance the account.

BOCCACCIO.

Let me try whether I cannot give you an example of such effect, having already given you the tedious dissertation.

PETRARCA.

Do your worst.

BOCCACCIO.

Not that neither, but bad enough.

THE PILGRIM'S SHELL.

Under a tuft of eglantine, at noon,
I saw a pilgrim loosen his broad shell
To catch the water off a stony tongue;
Medusa's it might be, or Pan's, erewhile,
For the huge head was shapeless, eaten out
By time and tempest here, and here embost
With clasping tangles of dark maidenhair.
"How happy is thy thirst! how soon assuaged!
How sweet that coldest water this hot day!"
Whispered my thoughts; not having yet observ'd
His shell so shallow and so chipt around.
Tall though he was, he held it higher, to meet
The sparkler at its outset: with fresh leap,
Vigorous as one just free upon the world,
Impetuous too as one first checkt, with stamp
Heavy as ten such sparklers might be deemed,
Rusht it amain, from cavity and rim
And rim's divergent channels, and dropt thick
(Issuing at wrist and elbow) on the grass.
The pilgrim shook his head, and fixing up
His scallop,
"There is something yet," said he,
"Too scanty in this world for my desires!"

PETRARCA.

Oh, Giovanni! these are better thoughts and opportuner than such lonely places formerly supplied us with. The whispers of rose-bushes were not always so innocent: under the budding and under the full-blown we sometimes found other images: sometimes the pure fountain failed in bringing purity to the heart.

Unholy fire sprang up in fields and woods,
The air that fann'd it, came from solitudes.

If our desires are worthy ones and accomplished, we rejoice in after-times; if unworthy and unsuccessful, we rejoice no less at their discomfiture and miscarriage. We cannot have all we wish for. Nothing is said oftener, nothing earlier, nothing later. It begins in the arms with the chidings of the nurse; it will terminate with the milder voice of the physician at the deathbed. But although everybody has heard and most have said it, yet nobody seems to have said or considered, that it is much, very much,

to be able to form and project our wishes; that, in the voyage we take to compass and turn them to account, we breathe freely and hopefully; and that it is chiefly in the stagnation of port we are in danger of disappointment and disease.

BOCCACCIO.

The young man who resolves to conquer his love, is only half in earnest or has already half conquered it. But fields and woods have no dangers now for us. I may be alone until doomsday, and loose thoughts will be at fault if they try to scent me.

PETRARCA.

When the rest of our smiles have left us, we may smile at our immunities. There are indeed, for nearly all,

Rocks on the shore wherefrom we launch on life,
Before our final harbour rocks again,
And (narrow sun-paced plains sailed swiftly by)
Eddies and breakers all the space between.

Yet Nature preserves her sedater charms for us both: and I doubt whether we do not enjoy them the more, by exemption from solicitations and distractions. We are not old while we can hear and enjoy, as much as ever,

The lonely bird, the bird of even-song,
When, catching one far call, he leaps elate,
In his full fondness drowns it, and again
The shrill shrill glee through Serravalle rings.

BOCCACCIO.

The nightingale is a lively bird to the young and joyous, a melancholy one to the declining and pensive. He has notes for every ear; he has feelings for every bosom; and he exercises over gentle souls a wider and more welcome dominion than any other creature. If I must not offer you my thanks, for bringing to me such associations as the bed-side of sickness is rarely in readiness to supply; if I must not declare to you how pleasant and well placed are your reflections on our condition, I may venture to remark on the nightingale, that our Italy is

the only country where this bird is killed for the market. In no other is the race of Avarice and Gluttony so hard run. What a triumph for a Florentine, to hold under his fork the most delightful being in all animated nature! the being to which every poet, or nearly every one, dedicates the first fruits of his labours. A cannibal who devours his enemy, through intolerable hunger, or, what he holds as the measure of justice and of righteousness, revenge, may be viewed with less abhorrence than the heartless gormandizer, who casts upon his loaded stomach the little breast that has poured delight on thousands.

PETRARCA.

The English, I remember *Ser Geoffreddo telling us, never kill singing-birds nor swallows.

BOCCACCIO.

Musick and hospitality are sweet and sacred things with them; and well may they value their few warm days, out of which, if the pro-

* Chaucer.

duce is not wine and oil, they gather song and garner sensibility.

PETRARCA.

Ser Geoffreddo felt more pleasure in the generosity and humanity of his countrymen, than in the victories they had recently won, with incredibly smaller numbers, over their boastful enemy.

BOCCACCIO.

I know not of what nation I could name so amusing a companion as Ser Geoffreddo. The Englishman is rather an island than an islander; bluff, stormy, rude, abrupt, repulsive, inaccessible. We must not however hold back or dissemble the learning, and wisdom, and courtesy, of the better. While France was without one single man above a dwarf in literature, and we in Italy had only a small sprinkling of it, Richard de Bury was sent embassador to Rome by King Edward. So great was his learning, that he composed two grammars, one greek, one hebrew; neither of which labours had been

attempted by the most industrious and erudite of those who spoke the languages: he likewise formed so complete a library as belongs only to the Byzantine emperors. This prelate came into Italy attended by Ser Geoffreddo, in whose company we spent, as you remember, two charming evenings at Arezzo.

PETRARCA.

What wonderful things his countrymen have been achieving in this century!

BOCCACCIO.

And how curious it is to trace them up into their Norwegian coves and creeks three or four centuries back!

PETRARCA.

Do you think it possible that Norway, which never could maintain sixty* thousand male adults, was capable of sending, from her native

* With the advantages of her fisheries, which did not exist in the age of Petrarca, and of her agriculture, which probably is quintupled since, Norway does not contain at present the double of the number.

population, a sufficient force of warriors to conquer the best province of France, and the whole of England? And you must deduct from these sixty thousand, the aged, the artisans, the cultivators, and the clergy, together with all the dependents of the church: which numbers, united, we may believe amounted to above one half.

BOCCACCIO.

That she could embody such an army from her own very scanty and scattered population, no, indeed: but if you recollect that a vast quantity of British had been ejected by incursions of Picts, and that also there had been on the borders a general insurrection against the Romans, and against those of half blood, (which is always the case in a rebellion of the Aboriginals,) and if you believe, as I do, that the ejected Romans, of the coast at least, became pirates, and were useful to the Scandinavians, by introducing what was needful of their arts and saleable of their plunder, taking in exchange their

iron and timber, you may readily admit as a probability, that by the display of spoils and the spirit of enterprize, they encouraged, headed, and carried into effect the invasion of France, and subsequently of England. The English gentlemen of Norman descent have neither blue eyes, in general, nor fair complexions, differing in physiognomy altogether both from the Belgic race and the Norwegian. Beside, they are remarkable for a sedate and somewhat repulsive pride, very different from the effervescent froth of the one, and the sturdy simplicity of the other. Ser Geoffreddo is not only the greatest genius, but likewise the most amiable of his nation. He gave his thoughts and took yours with equal freedom. His countrymen, if they give you any, throw them at your head; and, if they receive any, cast them under their feet before you. Courtesy is neither a quality of native growth, nor communicable to them. Their rivals, the French, are the best imitators in the world; the English the worst; particularly

under the instruction of the Graces. They have many virtues, no doubt; but they reserve them for the benefit of their families, or of their enemies; and they seldom take the trouble to unpack them in their short intercourse abroad.

PETRARCA.

Ser Geoffreddo, I well remember, was no less remarkable for courtesy than for cordiality.

BOCCACCIO.

He was really as attentive and polite toward us as if he had made us prisoners. It is on that occasion the English are most unlike their antagonists and themselves. What an evil must they think it to be vanquished! when, struggling with their bashfulness and taciturnity, they become so solicitous and inventive in raising the spirits of the fallen. The Frenchman is ready to truss you on his rapier, unless you acknowledge the perfection of his humanity, and to spit in your face, if you doubt for a moment the delicacy of his politeness. The

Englishman is almost angry if you mention either of these as belonging to him, and turns away from you that he may not hear it.

PETRARCA.

Let us felicitate ourselves that we rarely are forced to witness his self-affliction.

BOCCACCIO.

In palaces, and especially the pontifical, it is likely you saw the very worst of them: indeed, there are few in any other country of such easy, graceful, unaffected manners as our Italians. We are warmer at the extremities than at the heart: sunless nations have central fires. The Englishman is more gratified when you enable him to show you a fresh kindness, than when you remind him of a past one; and he forgets what he has conferred as readily as we forget what we have received. In our civility, in our good-nature, in our temperance, in our frugality, none excel us; and greatly are we in advance of other men, in the arts, in the sciences, in the culture, in the application, and in the power of

intellect. Our faculties are perfect, with the sole exception of memory; and our memory is only deficient in its retentiveness of obligation.

PETRARCA.

Better had it failed in almost all its other functions. Yet, if our countrymen presented any flagrant instances of ingratitude, Alighieri would have set apart a *bolga* for their reception.

BOCCACCIO.

When I correct and re-publish my *Commentary*, I must be as careful to gratify, as my author was to affront them. I know, from the nature of the Florentines and of the Italians in general, that in calling on me to produce one, they would rather I should praise indiscriminately than parsimoniously. And respect is due to them for repairing, by all the means in their power, the injustice their fathers committed; for enduring in humility his resentment; and for investing him with public ho-

nours, as they would some deity who had smitten them. Respect is due to them, and I will offer it, for placing their greatness on so firm a plinth, for deriving their pride from so wholesome a source, and for declaring to the world that the founder of a city is less than her poet and instructor.

PETRARCA.

In the precincts of those lofty monuments, those towers and temples, which have sprung up amidst her factions, the name of Dante is heard at last, and heard with such reverence as only the angels or the saints inspire.

BOCCACCIO.

There are towns so barbarous, that they must be informed by strangers of their own great man, when they happen to have produced one; and would then detract from his merits, that they might not exhibit their awkwardness in doing him honour, or their shame in withholding it. There are such; but not in Italy. I have seen youths standing and looking with

seriousness, and indeed with somewhat of veneration, on the broad and low stone bench, to the south of the cathedral, where Dante sat to enjoy the fresh air in summer evenings; and where Giotto, in conversation with him, watched the scaffolding rise higher and higher up his gracefullest of towers. It was truly a bold action, when a youngster pushed another down on the poet's seat. The surprised one blushed and struggled, as those do who unwittingly have been drawn into a penalty (not lightened by laughter) for having sitten in the imperial or the papal chair.

PETRARCA.

These are good signs, and never fallacious. In the presence of such young persons we ought to be very cautious how we censure a man of genius. One expression of irreverence may eradicate what demands the most attentive culture, may wither the first love for the fair and noble, and may shake the confidence of those who are about to give the hand to a guidance

less liable to error. We have ever been grateful to the Deity, for saving us from among the millions swept away by the pestilence, which depopulated the cities of Italy, and ravaged the whole of Europe: let us be equally grateful for an exemption as providential and as rare in the world of letters; an exemption from that *Plica Polonica* of invidiousness, which infests the squalider of poetical heads, and has not always spared those who ought to have been cleanlier.

BOCCACCIO.

Critics are indignant if we are silent, and petulant if we complain. You and I are so kindly and considerate in regard to them, that we rather pat their petulance than prick up their indignation.

Midas, while Apollo was flaying him leisurely and dexterously, with all the calmness of a god, shortened his upper lip prodigiously, and showed how royal teeth are fastened in the gums: his eyes grew blood-shot, and expanded to the size of rock-melons, though naturally, in length and

breadth, as well as colour, they more resembled a well-ripened bean-pod. And there issued from his smoking breast, and shook the leaves above it, a rapid irregular rush of yells and howlings. Remarking so material a change in his countenance and manners, a satyr, who was much his friend and deeply interested in his punishment, said calmly, "Midas! Midas! is it thou who cryest out so unworthily? If thou couldst only look down from that pleasant, smooth, shady beech-tree, thou wouldst have the satisfaction of seeing that thy skin is more than half drawn off thee: it is hardly worth while to make a bustle about it now."

PETRARCA.

Every Midas hath his consoling satyr. Probably when yours was flayed, he was found out to be a good musician, by those who recommended the flaying and celebrated the flayer. Among authors, none hath so many friends as he who is just now dead, and had the most enemies last week. Those who were then his adversa-

ries are now sincerely his admirers, for moving out of the way, and leaving one name less in the lottery. And yet, poor souls! the prize will never fall to them. There is something sweet and generous in the tone of praise, which captivates an ingenuous mind, whatever may be the subject of it; while propensity to censure not only excites suspicion of malevolence, but reminds the hearer of what he cannot disentangle from his earliest ideas of vulgarity. There being no pleasure in thinking ill, it is wonderful there should be any in speaking ill. You, my friend, can find none in it: but every step you are about to take in the revisal of your Lectures, will require much caution. Aware you must be that there are many more defects in our author than we have touched or glanced at: principally, the loose and shallow foundation of so vast a structure; its unconnectedness; its want of manners, of passion, of action, consistently and uninterruptedly at work toward a

distinct and worthy purpose; and lastly (although less importantly as regards the poetical character) that splenetick temper, which seems to grudge brightness to the flames of hell, to delight in deepening its gloom, in multiplying its miseries, in accumulating weight upon depression, and building labyrinths about perplexity.

BOCCACCIO.

Yet, O Francesco! when I remember what Dante had suffered and was suffering from the malice and obduracy of his enemies; when I feel (and how I do feel it!) that you also have been following up his glory through the same paths of exile, I can rest only on what is great in him; and the exposure of a fault appears to me almost an inhumanity.

The first time I ever walked to his villa on the Mugnone, I felt a vehement desire to enter it; and yet a certain awe came upon me, as about to take an unceremonious and an unlaw-

ful advantage of his absence. While I was hesitating, its inhabitant opened the gate, saluted, and invited me. My desire vanished at once; and although the civility far exceeded what a stranger as I was, and so young a stranger too, could expect or what probably the more illustrious owner would have vouchsafed, the place itself, and the disparity of its occupier, made me shrink from it in sadness, and stand before him almost silent. I believe I should do the same at the present day.

PETRARCA.

With such feelings, which are ours in common, there is little danger that we should be unjust toward him; and, if ever our opinions come before the public, we may disregard the petulance and aspersions of those whom nature never constituted our judges, as she did us of Dante. It is our duty to speak with freedom; it is theirs to listen with respect.

BOCCACCIO.

History would come much into the criticism,

and would perform the most interesting part in it. But I clearly see how unsafe it is to meddle with the affairs of families: and every family in Florence is a portion of the government, or has been lately. Every one preserves the annals of the republic; the facts being nearly the same, the inferences widely diverging, the motives utterly dissimilar. A strict examination of Dante would involve the bravest and most intelligent; and the court of Rome, with its royal agents, would persecute them as conspirators against religion, against morals, against the peace, the order, the existence of society. When studious and quiet men get into power, they fancy they cannot show too much activity, and very soon prove, by exerting it, that they can show too little discretion. The military, the knightly, the baronial, are spurred on to join in the chase; but the fleshers have other names and other instincts.

PETRARCA.

Posterity will regret that many of those allu-

sions to persons and events, which we now possess in the pages of Dante, have not reached her. Among the ancients there are few poets who more abound in them than Horace does, and yet we feel certain that there are many which are lost to us.

BOCCACCIO

I wonder you did not mention him before. Perhaps he is no favourite with you.

PETRARCA.

Why cannot we be delighted with an author, and even feel a predilection for him, without a dislike to others? An admiration of Catullus or Virgil, of Tibullus or Ovid, is never to be hightened by a discharge of bile on Horace.

BOCCACCIO.

The eyes of critics, whether in commending or carping, are both on one side, like a turbot's.

PETRARCA.

There are some men who delight in heating themselves with wine, and others with headstrong frowardness. These are resolved to agi-

tate the puddle of their blood by running into parties, literary or political, and espouse a champion's cause with such ardour that they run against everything in their way. Perhaps they never knew or saw the person, or understood his merits: what matter? No sooner was I about to be crowned, than it was predicted by these astrologers that Protonotary Nerucci and Cavallerizzo Vuotasacchetti (two lampooners, whose hands had latterly been kept from their occupation by drawing gold-embroidered gloves on them) would be rife in the mouths of men after my name had fallen into oblivion.

BOCCACCIO.

I never heard of them before.

PETRARCA.

So much the better for them, and none the worse for you. Vuotasacchetti had been convicted of filching in his youth; and Nerucci was so expert a logician, and so rigidly economical a moralist, that he never had occasion for veracity.

BOCCACCIO.

The upholders of such gentry are like little girls with their dolls: they must cloathe them, although they strip every other doll in the nursery. It is reported that our Giotto, a great mechanician as well as architect and painter, invented a certain instrument by which he could contract the dimensions of any head laid before him. But these gentlemen, it appears, have improved upon it, and not only can contract one, but enlarge another.

PETRARCA.

He could perform his undertaking with admirable correctness and precision; can they theirs?

BOCCACCIO.

I never heard they could: but well enough for their customers and their consciences.

PETRARCA.

I see then no great accuracy is required.

BOCCACCIO.

If they heard you they would think you very dull.

PETRARCA.

They have always thought me so: and, if they change their opinion, I shall begin to think so myself.

BOCCACCIO.

They have placed themselves just where, if we were mischievous, we might desire to see them. We have no power to make them false and malicious, yet they become so the moment they see or hear of us, and thus sink lower than our force could ever thrust them. Pigs, it is said, driven into a pool beyond their depth, cut their throats by awkward attempts at swimming. We could hardly wish them worse luck, although each had a devil in him. Come, let us away; we shall find a purer stream and pleasanter company on the Sabine farm.

PETRARCA.

We may indeed think the first ode of little value, the second of none, until we come to the sixth stanza.

BOCCACCIO.

Bad as are the first and second, they are better than that wretched one, sounded so lugubriously in our ears at school, as the masterpiece of the pathetick; I mean the ode addressed to Virgil on the death of Quinctilius Varus.

> Præcipe lugubres
> Cantus, Melpomene, cui liquidam pater
> Vocem cum citharâ dedit.

Did he want any one to help him to cry? What man immersed in grief cares a quattrino about Melpomene, or her father's fairing of an artificial cuckoo and a gilt guitar? What man, on such an occasion, is at leisure to amuse himself with the little plaister images of Pudor and Fides, of Justitia and Veritas, or disposed to make a comparison of Virgil and Orpheus? But if Horace had written a thousand-fold as much trash, we are never to forget that he also wrote

> Cœlo tonantem, &c.

in competition with which ode, the finest in the

greek language itself has, to my ear, too many low notes, and somewhat of a wooden sound. And give me *Vixi puellis*, and give me *Quis multâ gracilis*, and as many more as you please; for there are charms in nearly all of them. It now occurs to me that what is written, or interpolated,

Acer et *Mauri* peditis cruentum
Vultus in hostem,

should be *manci*; a foot-soldier *mutilated*, but looking with indignant courage at the trooper who inflicted the wound. The Mauritanians were celebrated only for their cavalry. In return for my suggestion, pray tell me what is the meaning of

Obliquo laborat
Lympha fugax trepidare rivo.

PETRARCA.

The moment I learn it, you shall have it. *Laborat trepidare! lympha rivo! fugax* too! *Fugacity* is not the action of hard work, or *labour.*

BOCCACCIO.

Since you cannot help me out, I must give up the conjecture, it seems, while it has cost me only half a century. Perhaps it may be a *curiosa felicitas.*

PETRARCA.

There again! Was there ever such an unhappy (not to say absurd) expression! And this from the man who wrote the most beautiful sentence in all latinity.

BOCCACCIO.

What is that?

PETRARCA.

I am ashamed of repeating it, although in itself it is innocent. The words are,

> Gratias ago languori tuo, quo diutius sub umbrâ voluptatis lusimus.

BOCCACCIO.

Tear out this from the volume; the rest, both prose and poetry, may be thrown away. In the *Dinner of Nasidienus*, I remember the expression *nosse laboro; I am anxious to know:* this

expedites the solution but little. In the same piece there is another odd expression.

> Tum in lecto quôque *videres*
> *Stridere* secretâ divisos aure *susurros*.

PETRARCA.

I doubt Horace's felicity in the choice of words, being quite unable to discover it, and finding more evidences of the contrary than in any contemporary or preceeding poet; but I do not doubt his infelicity in his *transpositions* of them, in which certainly he is more remarkable than whatsoever writer of antiquity. How simple, in comparison, are Catullus and Lucretius in the structure of their sentences! but the most simple and natural of all are Ovid and Tibullus. Your main difficulty lies in another road: it consists not in making explanations, but in avoiding them. Some scholars will assert that everything I have written in my sonnets is allegory or allusion; others will deny that anything is: and similarly of Dante. It was known throughout Italy that he was the

lover of *Beatrice* Porticari. He has celebrated her in many compositions; in prose and poetry, in latin and italian. Hence it became the safer for him afterward to introduce her as an allegorical personage, in opposition to the *Meretrice;* under which appellation he (and I subsequently) signified the Papacy. Our great poet wandered among the marvels of the Apocalypse, and fixed his eyes the most attentively on the words,

Veni, et ostendam tibi sponsam, uxorem Agni.

He, as you know, wrote a commentary on his *Commedia* at the close of his Treatise *de Monarchia.* But he chiefly aims at showing the duties of pope and emperor, and at explaining such parts of the poem as manifestly relate to them. The Patarini accused the pope of despoiling and defiling the church; the Ghibellines accused him of defrauding and rebelling against the emperor: Dante enlists both under his flaming banner; and exhibits the *Meretrice* stealing from *Beatrice* both the *divine* and the *august* chariot; the church and empire. Grave critics

will protest their inability to follow you through such darkness, saying, you are not worth the trouble, and they must give you up. If Laura and Fiametta were allegorical, they could inspire no tenderness in our readers, and little interest. But, alas! these are no longer the days to dwell on them.

Let human art exert her utmost force,
Pleasure can rise no higher than its source;
And there it ever stagnates where the ground
Beneath it, O Giovanni! is unsound.

BOCCACCIO.

You have given me a noble quotation; for which I can only offer you such a string of beads as I am used to carry about with me. Memory, they say, is the mother of the Muses: this is her gift, not theirs.

DEPARTURE FROM FIAMETTA.

When go I must, as well she knew,
And neither yet could say adieu,
Sudden was my Fiammetta's fear
To let me see or feel a tear.

It could but melt my heart away,
Nor add one moment to my stay.
But it was ripe and would be shed..
So from her cheek upon my head
It falling on the neck behind,
Hung on the hair she oft had twined.
Thus thought she, and her arm's soft strain
Claspt it, and down it fell again.

Come, come, bear your disappointment, and forgive my cheating you in the exchange! Ah Francesco! Francesco! well may you sigh; and I too; seeing we can do little now but make verses and doze, and want little but medicine and masses, while Fra Biagio is merry as a lark, and half master of the house. Do not look so grave upon me, for remembering so well another state of existence. He who forgets his love may still more easily forget his friendships. I am weak, I confess it, in yielding my thoughts to what returns no more; but you alone know my weakness.

PETRARCA.

We have loved; and so fondly as we believe

none other ever did; and yet, although it was in youth, Giovanni, it was not in the earliest white dawn, when we almost shrink at its freshness, when everything is pure and quiet, when little of earth is seen, and much of heaven. It was not so with us; it was with Dante. The little virgin Beatrice Porticari breathed all her purity into his boyish heart, and inhaled it back again; and if war and disaster, anger and disdain, seized upon it in her absence, they never could divert its course nor impede its destination. Happy the man who carries love with him in his opening day! he never loses its freshness in the meridian of life, nor its happier influence in the later hour. If Dante enthroned his Beatrice in the highest heaven, it was Beatrice who conducted him thither. Love, preceding passion, ensures, sanctifies, and I would say, survives it, were it not rather an absorption and transfiguration into its own most perfect purity and holiness.

BOCCACCIO.

Up! up! look into that chest of letters, out of which I took several of yours, to run over, yester-morning. All those of a friend whom we have lost, to say nothing of a tenderer affection, touch us sensibly, be the subject what it may. When, in taking them out to read again, we happen to come upon him in some pleasant mood, it is then the dead man's hand is at the heart. Opening the same paper long afterward, can we wonder if a tear has raised its little island in it? Leave me the memory of all my friends, even of the ungrateful! They must remind me of some kind feeling; and perhaps of theirs; and for that very reason they deserve another. It was not my fault if they turned out less worthy than I hoped and fancied them. Yet half the world complains of ingratitude, and the remaining half of envy. Of the one I have already told you my opinion, and heard yours; and the other we may surely bear with quite as much equanimity. For rarely are we envied, until we are so prosperous

that envy is rather a familiar in our train than an enemy who waylays us. If we saw nothing of such followers and outriders, and no scabbard with our initials upon it, we might begin to doubt of our station.

PETRARCA.

Giovanni! you are unsuspicious, and would scarcely see a monster in a minotaur. It is well however to draw good out of evil, and it is the peculiar gift of an elevated mind. Nevertheless, you must have observed, although with greater curiosity than concern, the slipperiness and tortuousness of your detractors.

BOCCACCIO.

Whatever they detract from me, they leave more than they can carry away. Beside, they always are detected.

PETRARCA.

When they are detected, they raise themselves up fiercely, as if their nature were erect and they could reach your highth.

BOCCACCIO.

Envy would conceal herself under the shadow

and shelter of contemptuousness, but she swells too huge for the den she creeps into. Let her lie there and crack, and think no more about her. The people you have been talking of can find no greater and no other faults in my writings than I myself am willing to show them, and still more willing to correct. There are many things, as you have just now told me, very unworthy of their company.

PETRARCA.

He who has much gold is none the poorer for having much silver too. When a king of old displayed his wealth and magnificence before a philosopher, the philosopher's exclamation was,

"How many things are here which I do not want!"

Does not the same reflection come upon us, when we have laid aside our compositions for a time, and look into them again more leisurely? Do we not wonder at our own profusion, and say like the philosopher,

"How many things are here which I do not want!"

It may happen that we pull up flowers with weeds; but better this than rankness. We must bear to see our first-born despatched before our eyes, and give them up quietly.

BOCCACCIO.

The younger will be the most reluctant. There are poets among us who mistake in themselves the freckles of the hay-fever for beauty-spots. In another half-century their volumes will be inquired after; but only for the sake of cutting out an illuminated letter from the title-page, or of transplanting the willow at the end, that hangs so prettily over the tomb of Amaryllis. If they wish to be healthy and vigorous, let them open their bosoms to the breezes of Sunium; for the air of Latium is heavy and overcharged. Above all, they must remember two admonitions; first, that sweet things hurt digestion; secondly, that great sails are ill adapted to small vessels. What is there lovely

in poetry unless there be moderation and composure? Are they not better than the hot uncontrollable harlotry of a flaunting disheveled right enthusiasm? Whoever has the power of creating, has likewise the inferior power of keeping his creation in order. The best poets are the most impressive, because their steps are regular; for without regularity there is neither strength nor state. Look at Sophocles, look at Eschylus, look at Homer.

PETRARCA.

I agree with you entirely to the whole extent of your observations; and, if you will continue, I am ready to lay aside my Dante for the present.

BOCCACCIO.

No, no; we must have him again between us: there is no danger that he will sour our tempers.

PETRARCA.

In comparing his and yours, since you forbid me to declare all I think of your genius, you will

at least allow me to congratulate you as being the happier of the two.

BOCCACCIO.

Frequently, where there is great power in poetry, the imagination makes encroachments on the heart, and uses it as her own. I have shed tears on writings which never cost the writer a sigh, but which occasioned him to rub the palms of his hands together, until they were ready to strike fire, with satisfaction at having overcome the difficulty of being tender.

PETRARCA.

Giovanni! are you not grown satirical?

BOCCACCIO.

Not in this. It is a truth as broad and glaring as the eye of the Cyclops. To make you amends for your shuddering, I will express my doubt, on the other hand, whether Dante felt all the indignation he threw into his poetry. We are immoderately fond of warming ourselves; and we do not think, or care, what the fire is composed of. Be sure it is not always of cedar,

like Circe's.* Our Alighieri had slipt into the habit of vituperation; and he thought it fitted him; so he never left it off.

PETRARCA.

Serener colours are pleasanter to our eyes and more becoming to our character. The chief desire in every man of genius is to be thought one; and no fear or apprehension lessens it. Alighieri, who certainly had studied the gospel, must have been conscious that he not only was inhumane, but that he betrayed a more vindictive spirit than any pope or prelate enshrined within the fretwork of his golden grating.

BOCCACCIO.

Unhappily, his strong talon had grown into him, and it would have pained him to suffer its amputation. This eagle, unlike Jupiter's, never loosened the thunderbolt from it under the influence of harmony.

* Dives inaccessis ubi Solis filia lucis
Urit odoratam nocturna in lumina cedrum.—ÆN.

PETRARCA.

The only good thing we can expect in such minds and tempers, is good poetry: let us at least get that; and, having it, let us keep and value it. If you had never written some wanton stories, you would never have been able to show the world how much wiser and better you grew afterward.

BOCCACCIO.

Alas! if I live, I hope to show it. You have raised my spirits: and now, dear Francesco! do say a couple of prayers for me, while I lay together the materials of a tale; a right merry one, I promise you. Faith! it shall amuse you, and pay decently for the prayers; a good honest litany-worth. I hardly know whether I ought to have a nun in it: do you think I may?

PETRARCA.

Cannot you do without one?

BOCCACCIO.

No; a nun I must have: say nothing against her; I can more easily let the abbess alone. But

Frate Biagio* .. that Frate Biagio, who never came to visit me but when he thought I was at extremities or asleep ... Assuntina! are you there?

PETRARCA.

No; do you want her?

BOCCACCIO.

Not a bit. That Frate Biagio has hightened

* Our San Vivaldo is enriched by his deposit. In the church, on the fifth flagstone from before the high altar, is this inscription,

HIC SITUS EST,
BEATAM IMMORTALITATEM EXPECTANS,
D. BLASIUS DE BLASIIS,
HUJUS CŒNOBII ABBAS,
SINGULARI VIR CHARITATE,
MORIBUS INTEGERRIMIS,
REI THEOLOGICÆ NEC NON PHYSICÆ
PERITISSIMUS.
ORATE PRO ANIMA EJUS.

To the word *orate* have been prefixt the letters PL, the aspiration, no doubt, of some friendly monk; although Monsignore thinks it susceptible of two interpretations; the other he reserves *in petto*. D. G.

my pulse when I could not lower it again. The very devil is that Frate for hightening pulses. And with him I shall now make merry . . God willing . . in God's good time . . should it be his divine will to restore me; which I think he has begun to do miraculously. I seem to be within a frog's leap of well again; and we will presently have some rare fun in my *Tale of the Frate.*

PETRARCA.

Do not openly name him.

BOCCACCIO.

He shall recognise himself by one single expression. He said to me, when I was at the worst,

"*Ser Giovanni! it would not be much amiss (with permission!) if you begin to think (at any spare time) just a morsel, of eternity.*"

"*Ah! Fra Biagio!*" answered I, contritely, "*I never heard a sermon of yours but I thought of it seriously and uneasily, long before the discourse was over.*"

"*So must all,*" replied he, "*and yet few have the grace to own it.*"

Now mind, Francesco! if it should please the Lord to call me unto him, mind, I say, *The Nun and Fra Biagio* will be found, after my decease, in the closet cut out of the wall, behind yon Saint Zacharias in blue and yellow.

Well done! well done! Francesco. I never heard any man repeat his prayers so fast and fluently. Why! how many (at a guess) have you repeated? Such is the power of friendship, and such the habit of religion! They have done me good: I feel myself stronger already. To-morrow I think I shall be able, by leaning on that stout maple-stick in the corner, to walk half over my podere.

Have you done? have you done?

PETRARCA.

Be quiet: you may talk too much.

BOCCACCIO.

I cannot be quiet for another hour; so, if you have any more prayers to get over, stick the spur into the other side of them: they must verily speed, if they beat the last.

PETRARCA.

Be more serious, dear Giovanni.

BOCCACCIO.

Never bid a convalescent be more serious: no, nor a sick man, neither. To health it may give that composure which it takes away from sickness. Every man will have his hours of seriousness; but, like the hours of rest, they often are ill chosen and unwholesome. Be assured, our heavenly Father is as well pleased to see his children in the playground as in the schoolroom. He has provided both for us, and has given us intimations when each should occupy us.

PETRARCA.

You are right, Giovanni! but we know which bell is heard the most distinctly. We fold our arms at the one, try the cooler part of the pillow, and turn again to slumber: at the first stroke of the other, we are beyond our monitors. As for you, hardly Dante himself could make you grave.

BOCCACCIO.

I do not remember how it happened that we slipped away from his side. One of us must have found him tedious.

PETRARCA.

If you were really and substantially at his side, he would have no mercy on you.

BOCCACCIO.

In sooth, our good Alighieri seems to have had the appetite of a dogfish or shark, and to have bitten the harder the warmer he was. I would not voluntarily be under his manifold rows of dentals. He has an incisor to every saint in the calendar. I should fare, methinks, like Brutus and the Archbishop. He is forced to stretch himself, out of sheer listlessness, in so idle a place as Purgatory: he loses half his strength in Paradise: Hell alone keeps him alert and lively: there he moves about and threatens as tremendously as the serpent that opposed the legions on their march in Africa. He would not have been contented in Tuscany

itself, even had his enemies left him unmolested. Were I to write on his model a tripartite poem, I think it should be entitled, *Earth, Italy, and Heaven.*

PETRARCA.

You will never give yourself the trouble.

BOCCACCIO.

I should not succeed.

PETRARCA.

Perhaps not: but you have done very much, and may be able to do very much more.

BOCCACCIO.

Wonderful is it to me, when I consider that an infirm and helpless creature, as I am, should be capable of laying thoughts up in their cabinets of words, which Time, as he rushes by, with the revolutions of stormy and destructive years, can never move from their places. On this coarse mattrass, one among the homeliest in the fair at Impruneta, is stretched an old burgess of Certaldo, of whom perhaps more will be known hereafter than we know of the Ptolemies and

the Pharaohs; while popes and princes are lying as unregarded as the fleas that are shaken out of the window. Upon my life, Francesco! to think of this is enough to make a man presumptuous.

PETRARCA.

No, Giovanni! not when the man thinks justly of it, as such a man ought to do, and must. For, so mighty a power over Time, who casts all other mortals under his, comes down to us from a greater; and it is only if we abuse the victory that it were better we had encountered a defeat. Unremitting care must be taken that nothing soil the monuments we are raising: sure enough we are that nothing can subvert, and nothing but our negligence, or worse than negligence, efface them. Under the glorious lamp entrusted to your vigilance, one among the lights of the world, which the ministering angels of our God have suspended for his service, let there stand, with unclosing eyes, Integrity, Compassion, Self-denial.

BOCCACCIO.

These are holier and cheerfuller images than Dante has been setting up before us. I hope every thesis in dispute among his theologians will be settled ere I set foot among them. I like Tuscany well enough: it answers all my purposes for the present; and I am without the benefit of those preliminary studies which might render me a worthy auditor of incomprehensible wisdom.

PETRARCA.

I do not wonder you are attached to Tuscany. Many as have been your visits and adventures in other parts, you have rendered it pleasanter and more interesting than any: and indeed we can scarcely walk in any quarter from the gates of Florence, without the recollection of some witty or affecting story related by you. Every street, every farm, is peopled by your genius: and this population cannot change with seasons or with ages, with factions or with incursions. Ghibellines and Guelphs

will have been contested for only by the worms, long before the Decameron has ceased to be recited on our banks of blue lilies and under our arching vines. Another plague may come amidst us; and something of a solace in so terrible a visitation would be found in your pages, by those to whom letters are a refuge and relief.

BOCCACCIO.

I do indeed think my little bevy from Santa Maria Novella would be better company on such an occasion, than a devil with three heads, who diverts the pain his claws inflicted, by sticking his fangs in another place.

PETRARCA.

This is atrocious, not terrific nor grand. Alighieri is grand by his lights, not by his shadows; by his human affections, not by his infernal. As the minutest sands are the labours of some profound sea, or the spoils of some vast mountain, in like manner his horrid wastes and wearying minutenesses are the chafings of a tur-

bulent spirit, grasping the loftiest things and penetrating the deepest, and moving and moaning on the earth in loneliness and sadness.

BOCCACCIO.

Among men he is what among waters is
The strange, mysterious, solitary Nile.

PETRARCA.

Is that his verse? I do not remember it.

BOCCACCIO.

No, it is mine for the present: how long it may continue mine I cannot tell. I never run after those who steal my apples: it would only tire me; and they are hardly worth recovering when they are bruised and bitten, as they are usually. I would not stand upon my verses: it is a perilous boy's trick, which we ought to leave off when we put on square shoes. Let our prose show what we are, and our poetry what we have been.

PETRARCA.

You would never have given this advice to Alighieri.

BOCCACCIO.

I would never plow porphyry; there is ground fitter for grain. Alighieri is the parent of his system, like the sun, about whom all the worlds are but particles thrown forth from him. We may write little things well, and accumulate one upon another; but never will any be justly called a great poet unless he has treated a great subject worthily. He may be the poet of the lover and of the idler, he may be the poet of green fields or gay society; but whoever is this can be no more. A throne is not built of birds'-nests, nor do a thousand reeds make a trumpet.

PETRARCA.

I wish Alighieri had blown his on nobler occasions.

BOCCACCIO.

We may rightly wish it: but, in regretting what he wanted, let us acknowledge what he had: and never forget (which we omitted to mention) that he borrowed less from his predecessors than any of the Roman poets from

theirs. Reasonably may it be expected that almost all who follow will be greatly more indebted to antiquity, to whose stores we, every year, are making some addition.

PETRARCA.

It can be held no flaw in the title-deeds of genius, if the same thoughts re-appear as have been exhibited long ago. The indisputable sign of defect should be looked for in the proportion they bear to the unquestionably original. There are ideas which necessarily must occur to minds of the like magnitude and materials, aspect and temperature. When two ages are in the same phasis, they will excite the same humours, and produce the same coincidences and combinations. In addition to which, a great poet may really borrow: he may even condescend to an obligation at the hand of an equal or inferior: but he forfeits his title if he borrows more than the amount of his own possessions. The nightingale himself takes somewhat of his song from birds less glorified: and the lark, having beaten

with her wing the very gates of heaven, cools her breast among the grass. The lowlier of intellect may lay out a table in their field, at which table the highest one shall sometimes be disposed to partake: want does not compel him. Imitation, as we call it, is often weakness, but it likewise is often sympathy.

BOCCACCIO.

Our poet was seldom accessible in this quarter. Invective picks up the first stone on the wayside, and wants leisure to consult a forerunner.

PETRARCA.

Dante (original enough everywhere) is coarse and clumsy in this career. Vengeance has nothing to do with comedy, nor properly with satire. The satirist who told us that Indignation made his verses * for him, might have been told in return that she excluded him thereby from the first classes, and thrust him among the rhetoricians and declaimers. Lucre-

* Facit indignatio versum. Juv.

tius, in his vituperation, is graver and more dignified than Alighieri. Painful! to see how tolerant is the atheist, how intolerant the catholick: how anxiously the one removes from among the sufferings of Mortality, her last and heaviest, the fear of a vindictive Fury pursuing her shadow across rivers of fire and tears; how laboriously the other brings down Anguish and Despair, even when Death has done his work. How grateful the one is to that beneficent philosopher who made him at peace with himself, and tolerant and kindly toward his fellow-creatures! how importunate the other that God should forego his divine mercy, and hurl everlasting torments both upon the dead and living!

BOCCACCIO.

I have always heard that Ser Dante was a very good man and sound catholick: but Christ forgive me if my heart is oftener on the side of *Lucretius! Observe, I say my heart; nothing

* Qy. How much of Lucretius (or Petronius or Catullus, before cited) was then known? Remark by Monsignore.

more. I devoutly hold to the sacraments and the mysteries: yet somehow, I would rather see men tranquillized than frightened out of their senses, and rather fast asleep than burning. Sometimes I have been ready to believe, as far as our holy faith will allow me, that it were better our Lord were nowhere, than torturing in his inscrutable wisdom, to all eternity, so many myriads of us poor devils, the creatures of his hands. Do not cross thyself so thickly, Francesco! nor hang down thy nether lip so loosely, languidly, and helplessly; for I would be a good catholick, alive or dead. But, upon my conscience, it goes hard with me to think it of him, when I hear that woodlark yonder, gushing with joyousness, or when I see the beautiful clouds, resting so softly one upon another, dissolving . . and not damned for it. Above all, I am slow to apprehend it, when I remember his great goodness vouchsafed to me, and reflect on my sinful life heretofore, chiefly in summer-time, and in cities, or their vicinity.

But I was tempted beyond my strength; and I fell, as any man might do. However, this last illness, by God's grace, has well nigh brought me to my right mind again in all such matters: and, if I get stout in the present month, and can hold out the next without sliding, I do verily think I am safe, or nearly so, until the season of beccaficoes.

PETRARCA.

Be not too confident!

BOCCACCIO.

Well, I will not be.

PETRARCA.

But be firm.

BOCCACCIO.

Assuntina! what! are you come in again?

ASSUNTA.

Did you or my master call me, Riverenza?

PETRARCA.

No, child!

BOCCACCIO.

O! get you gone! get you gone! you little rogue you!

Francesco, I feel quite well. Your kindness to my playful creatures in the Decameron has revived me, and has put me into good-humour with the greater part of them. Are you quite certain the Madonna will not expect me to keep my promise? You said you were: I need not ask you again. I will accept the whole of your assurances, and half your praises.

PETRARCA.

To represent so vast a variety of personages so characteristically as you have done, to give the wise all their wisdom, the witty all their wit, and (what is harder to do advantageously) the simple all their simplicity, requires a genius such as you alone possess. Those who doubt it are the least dangerous of your rivals.

FIFTH DAY'S INTERVIEW.

It being now the last morning that Petrarca could remain with his friend, he resolved to pass early into his bed-chamber. Boccaccio had risen, and was standing at the open window, with his arms against it. Renovated health sparkled in the eyes of the one; surprise and delight and thankfulness to Heaven, filled the other's with sudden tears. He clasped Giovanni, kissed his flaccid and sallow cheek, and falling on his knees, adored the Giver of life, the source of health to body and soul. Giovanni was not unmoved: he bent one knee as he leaned on the shoulder of Francesco, looking down into his face, repeating his words, and adding,

"Blessed be thou, O Lord! who sendest me health again! and blessings on thy messenger who brought it."

He had slept soundly; for, ere he closed his eyes, he had unburdened his mind of its freight, not only by employing the prayers appointed by Holy Church, but likewise by ejaculating; as sundry of the fathers did of old. He acknowledged his contrition for many transgressions, and chiefly for uncharitable thoughts of Fra Biagio: on which occasion he turned fairly round on his couch, and leaning his brow against the wall, and his body being in a becomingly curved position, and proper for the purpose, he thus ejaculated,

"Thou knowest, O most Holy Virgin! that never have I spoken to handmaiden at this villetta, or within my mansion at Certaldo, wantonly or indiscreetly, but have always been, inasmuch as may be, the guardian of innocence; deeming it better, when irregular thoughts assailed me, to

ventilate them abroad than to poison the house with them. And if, sinner as I am! I have thought uncharitably of others, and more especially of Fra Biagio, pardon me, out of thy exceeding great mercies! And let it not be imputed to me, if I have kept, and may keep hereafter, an eye over him, in wariness and watchfulness; not otherwise. For thou knowest, O Madonna! that many who have a perfect and unwavering faith in thee, yet do cover up their cheese from the nibblings of vermin." Whereupon, he turned round again, threw himself on his back at full length, and feeling the sheets cool, smooth, and refreshing, folded his arms, and slept instantaneously. The consequence of his wholesome slumber was a calm alacrity: and the idea that his visitor would be happy at seeing him on his feet again, made him attempt to get up: at which he succeeded, to his own wonder. And it was increased by the manifestation of his strength in opening the casement,

stiff from being long closed, and swelled by the continuance of the rains. The morning was warm and sunny: and it is known that on this occasion he composed the verses below.

My old familiar cottage-green!
I see once more thy pleasant sheen;
The gossamer suspended over
Smart celandine by lusty clover;
And the last blossom of the plum
Inviting her first leaves to come;
Which hang a little back, but show
'Tis not their nature to say no.
I scarcely am in voice to sing
How graceful are the steps of Spring;
And ah! it makes me sigh to look
How leaps along my merry brook,
The very same to-day, as when
He chirrupt first to maids and men.

PETRARCA.

I can rejoice at the freshness of your feelings: but the sight of the green turf reminds me rather of its ultimate use and destination.

For many serves the parish pall,
The turf in common serves for all.

BOCCACCIO.

Very true; and, such being the case, let us carefully fold it up, and lay it by until we call for it.

Francesco, you made me quite light-headed yesterday. I am rather too old to dance either with Spring, as I have been saying, or with Vanity: and yet I accepted her at your hand as a partner. In future, no more of comparisons for me! You not only can do me no good, but you can leave me no pleasure: for here I shall remain the few days I have to live, and shall see nobody who will be disposed to remind me of your praises. Beside, you yourself will get hated for them. We neither can deserve praise nor receive it with impunity.

PETRARCA.

Have you never remarked that it is into quiet water that children throw pebbles to disturb it? and that it is into deep caverns that the idle drop sticks and dirt? We must expect such treatment.

BOCCACCIO.

Your admonition shall have its wholesome influence over me, when the fever your praises have excited has grown moderate."

After the conversation on this topic and various others had continued some time, it was interrupted by a visiter. The clergy and monkery at Certaldo had never been cordial with Messer Giovanni, it being suspected that certain of his *Novelle* were modelled on originals in their orders. Hence, although they indeed both professed and felt esteem for Canonico Petrarca, they abstained from expressing it at the viletta. But Frate Biagio of San Vivaldo was (by his own appointment) the friend of the house; and, being considered as very expert in pharmacy, had, day after day, brought over no indifferent store of simples, in ptisans, and other refections, during the continuance of Ser Giovanni's ailment. Something now moved him to cast about in his mind, whether it might not appear dutiful to make another visit. Perhaps

he thought it possible that, among those who peradventure had seen him lately on the road, one or other might expect from him a solution of the questions, What sort of person was the *crowned martyr?* whether he carried a palm in his hand? whether a seam was visible across the throat? whether he wore a ring over his glove, with a chrysolite in it, like the bishops, but representing the city of Jerusalem and the judgment-seat of Pontius Pilate? Such were the reports; but the inhabitants of San Vivaldo could not believe the Certaldese, who, inhabiting the next township to them, were naturally their enemies. Yet they might believe Frate Biagio, and certainly would interrogate him accordingly. He formed his determination, put his frock and hood on, and gave a curvature to his shoe, to evince his knowledge of the world, by pushing the extremity of it with his breast-bone against the corner of his cell. Studious of his figure and his attire, he walked as much as possible on his heels, to keep up the

reformation he had wrought in the workmanship of the cordwainer. On former occasions he had borrowed a horse, as being wanted to hear confession or to carry medicines, which might otherwise be too late. But, having put on an entirely new habiliment, and it being the season when horses are beginning to do the same, he deemed it prudent to travel on foot. Approaching the villetta, his first intention was to walk directly into his patient's room: but he found it impossible to resist the impulses of pride, in showing Assunta his rigid and stately frock, and shoes rather of the equestrian order than the monastic. So he went into the kitchen where the girl was at work, having just taken away the remains of the breakfast.

"Frate Biagio!" cried she, "is this you? Have you been sleeping at Conte Jeronimo's?

"Not I," replied he.

"Why," said she, "those are surely his shoes! Santa Maria! you must have put them on in the dusk of the morning, to say your prayers in!

Here! here! take these old ones of Signor Padrone, for the love of God! I hope your Reverence met nobody."

FRATE.

What dost smile at?

ASSUNTA.

Smile at! I could find in my heart to laugh outright, if I only were certain that nobody had seen your Reverence in such a funny trim. Riverenza! put on these.

FRATE.

Not I, indeed.

ASSUNTA.

Allow me, then?

FRATE.

No, nor you.

ASSUNTA.

Then let me stand upon yours, to push down the points.

Frate Biagio now began to relent a little, when Assunta, who had made one step toward the project, bethought herself suddenly, and said, "No; I might miss my footing. But, mercy

upon us! what made you cramp your Reverence with those ox-yoke shoes? and strangle your Reverence with that hang-dog collar?"

"If you must know," answered the Frate, reddening, "it was because I am making a visit to the Canonico of Parma. I should like to know something about him: perhaps you could tell me?"

ASSUNTA.

Ever so much.

FRATE.

I thought no less: indeed, I knew it. Which goes to bed first?

ASSUNTA.

Both together.

FRATE.

"Demonio! what dost mean?"

ASSUNTA.

He tells me never to sit up waiting, but to say my prayers and dream of the Virgin.

FRATE.

As if it was any business of his! Does he put out his lamp himself?

ASSUNTA.

To be sure he does: why should not he? what should he be afraid of? It is not winter: and beside, there is a mat upon the floor, all round the bed, excepting the top and bottom.

FRATE.

I am quite convinced he never said anything to make you blush. Why are you silent?

ASSUNTA.

I have a right.

FRATE.

He did then? ay? Do not nod your head: that will never do. Discreet girls speak plainly.

ASSUNTA.

What would you have?

FRATE.

The truth; the truth; again, I say, the truth.

ASSUNTA.

He *did* then.

FRATE.

I knew it! The most dangerous man living!

ASSUNTA.

Ah! indeed he is! Signore Padrone said so.

FRATE.

He knows him of old: he warned you, it seems.

ASSUNTA.

Me! He never said it was I who was in danger.

FRATE.

He might: it was his duty.

ASSUNTA.

Am I so fat? Lord! you may feel every rib. Girls who run about as I do, slip away from apoplexy.

FRATE.

Ho! ho! that is all, is it?

ASSUNTA.

And bad enough too! that such good-natured men should ever grow so bulky; and stand in danger, as Padrone said they both do, of such a seizure!

FRATE.

What! and art ready to cry about it? Old folks cannot die easier: and there always are plenty of younger to run quick enough for a confessor. But I must not trifle in this manner. It is my duty to set your feet in the right way: it is my bounden duty to report to Ser Giovanni all irregularities I know of, committed in his domicile. I could indeed, and would, remit a trifle, on hearing the worst. Tell me now, Assuntina! tell me, you little angel! did you... we all may, the very best of us may, and do... sin, my sweet?

ASSUNTA.

You may be sure I did not: for whenever I sin I run into church directly, although it snows or thunders: else I never could see again Padrone's face, or any one's.

FRATE.

You do not come to me.

ASSUNTA.

You live at San Vivaldo.

FRATE.

But when there is sin so pressing I am always ready to be found. You perplex, you puzzle me. Tell me at once how he made you blush.

ASSUNTA.

Well then!

FRATE.

Well then! you did not hang back so before him. I lose all patience.

ASSUNTA.

So famous a man!...

FRATE.

No excuse in that.

ASSUNTA.

So dear to Padrone...

FRATE.

The more shame for him!

ASSUNTA.

Called me..

FRATE.

And *called* you, did he? the traitorous swine!

ASSUNTA.

Called me . . *good girl.*

FRATE.

Psha! the wenches, I think, are all mad: but few of them in this manner.

Without saying another word, Fra Biagio went forward and opened the bedchamber-door, saying, briskly,

"Servant! Ser Giovanni! Ser Canonico! most devoted! most obsequious! I venture to incommode you. Thanks to God, Ser Canonico, you are looking well for your years. They tell me you were formerly (who would believe it!) the handsomest man in Christendom, and worked your way glibly, yonder at Avignon.

Capperi! Ser Giovanni! I never observed that you were sitting bolt-upright in that long-backt arm-chair, instead of lying abed. Quite in the right? I am rejoiced at such a change for the better. Who advised it?

BOCCACCIO.

So many thanks to Fra Biagio! I not only am sitting up, but have taken a draught of fresh air at the window, and every leaf had a little present of sunshine for me.

There is one pleasure, Fra Biagio, which I fancy you never have experienced, and I hardly know whether I ought to wish it you; the first sensations of health after a long confinement.

FRATE.

Thanks! infinite! I would take any man's word for that, without a wish to try it. Everybody tells me I am exactly what I was a dozen years ago; while, for my part, I see everybody changed: those who ought to be much about my age, even those.. Per Bacco! I told them my thoughts when they had told me theirs; and they were not so agreeable as they used to be in former days.

BOCCACCIO.

How people hate sincerity.

Cospetto! why, Frate! what hast got upon thy toes? Hast killed some Tartar and tucked his bow into one, and torn the crescent from the vizier's tent to make the other match it? Hadst thou fallen in thy mettlesome expedition (and it is a mercy and a miracle thou didst not) those sacrilegious shoes would have impaled thee.

FRATE.

It was a mistake in the shoe-maker. But no pain or incommodity whatsoever could detain me from paying my duty to Ser Canonico, the first moment I heard of his auspicious arrival, or from offering my congratulations to Ser Giovanni, on the annunciation that he was recovered and looking out of the window. All Tuscany was standing on the watch for it, and the news flew like lightning. By this time it is upon the Danube.

And pray, Ser Canonico, how does Madonna Laura do?

PETRARCA.

Peace to her gentle spirit! she is departed.

FRATE.

Ay, true. I had quite forgotten: that is to say, I recollect it. You told us as much, I think, in a poem on her death. Well, and do you know! our friend Giovanni here is a bit of an author, in his way.

BOCCACCIO.

Frate! you confuse my modesty.

FRATE.

Murder will out. It is a fact, on my conscience. Have you never heard anything about it, Canonico? Ha! we poets are sly fellows: we can keep a secret.

BOCCACCIO.

Are you quite sure you can?

FRATE.

Try, and trust me with any. I am a confessional on legs: there is no more a whisper in me than in a woolsack.

BOCCACCIO.

I am in feather again, as you see; and in tune, as you shall hear.

FRATE.

April is not the month for moping. Sing it lustily.

BOCCACCIO.

Let it be your business to sing it, being a Frate; I can only recite it.

FRATE.

Pray do then.

BOCCACCIO.

Frate Biagio ! sempre quando
Quà tu vieni cavalcando,

* Avendo io fatto comparire nel nostro idioma toscano, e senza traduzione, i leggiadri versi sopra stampati, chiedo perdono da chi legge. Non potei, badando con dovuta premura ae miei interessi ed a quelli del proposito mio, non potei, dico, far di meno ; stanteche una riunione de' critici, i più vistosi del Regno unito d' Inghilterra ed Irlanda, avranno con unanimità dichiarato, che nessuno, di quanti esistono i mortali, saprà mai indovinare la versione. Stimo assai il trad-



Pensi che le buone strade
Per il mondo sien ben rade ;
E, di quante sono brutte,
La più brutta é tua di tutte.
Badi, non cascare sulle
Graziosissime fanciulle,
Che con capo dritto, alzato,
Uova portano al mercato.
Pessima mi pare l'opra
Rovesciarle sottosopra.
Deh! scansando le erte e sassi,
Sempre con premura passi.
Caro amico! Frate Biagio! ·
Passi pur, ma passi adagio.

duttore ; lavora per poco, e agevolmente ; mi pare piutosto galantuomo ; non c' è male ; ma poeta poco felice poi. Parlano que' Signori critici riveritissimi di certi poemetti e frammenti già da noi ammessi in questo volume, ed anche di altri del medesimo autore forse originali, e restano di avviso commune, che non vi sia neppure una sola parola veramente da intendersi · che il senso (chi sa ?) sarà di *ateismo*, ovvero di *alto tradimento*. Che *questo* non lo sia, nè palsesamente nè occultamente, fermo col proprio pugno.

Domenico Grigi.

FRATE.

Well now really, Canonico, for one not exactly one of us, that canzone of Ser Giovanni has merit; has not it? I did not ride, however, to-day; as you may see by the lining of my frock. But *plus non vitiat;* ay, Canonico! About the roads he is right enough; they are the devil's own roads; that must be said for them.

Ser Giovanni! with permission! your mention of eggs in the canzone, has induced me to fancy I could eat a pair of them. The hens lay well now: that white one of yours is worth more than the goose that laid the golden: and you have a store of others, her equals or betters: we have none like them at poor St. Vivaldo. *A riverderci, Ser Giovanni! Schiavo! Ser Canonico! mi commandino.*"

Fra Biagio went back into the kitchen, helped himself to a quarter of a loaf, ordered a flask of wine, and, trying several eggs against his lips, selected seven, which he himself fried in oil, although the maid offered her services. He never

had been so little disposed to enter into conversation with her; and, on her asking him how he found her master, he replied, that in bodily health, Ser Giovanni, by his prayers and ptisans, had much improved, but that his faculties were wearing out apace. "He may now run in the same couples with the Canonico: they cannot catch the mange one of the other: the one could say nothing to the purpose, and the other nothing at all. The whole conversation was entirely at my charge," added he. "And now, Assunta, since you press it, I will accept the service of your master's shoes. How I shall ever get home I don't know." He took the shoes off the handles of the bellows, where Assunta had placed them out of her way, and tucking one of his own under each arm, limped toward St. Vivaldo.

The unwonted attention to smartness of apparel, in the only article wherein it could be displayed, was suggested to Frate Biagio by hearing that Ser Francesco, accustomed to

courtly habits and elegant society, and having not only small hands, but small feet, usually wore red slippers in the morning. Fra Biagio had scarcely left the outer door, than he cordially cursed Ser Francesco for making such a fool of him, and wearing slippers of black list. "These canonicoes," said he, "not only lie themselves, but teach everybody else to do the same. He has lamed me for life: I burn as if I had been shod at the blacksmith's forge."

The two friends said nothing about him, but continued the discourse which his visit had interrupted.

PETRARCA.

Turn again, I entreat you, to the serious; and do not imagine that because by nature you are inclined to playfulness, you must therefore write ludicrous things better. Many of your stories would make the gravest men laugh, and yet there is little wit in them.

BOCCACCIO.

I think so myself; though authors, little dis-

posed as they are, to doubt their possession of any quality they would bring into play, are least of all suspicious on the side of wit. You have convinced me. I am glad to have been tender, and to have written tenderly: for I am certain it is this alone that has made you love me with such affection.

PETRARCA.

Not this alone, Giovanni! but this principally. I have always found you kind and compassionate, liberal and sincere, and when Fortune does not stand very close to such a man, she leaves only the more room for Friendship.

BOCCACCIO.

Let her stand off then, now and for ever! To my heart, to my heart, Francesco! preserver of my health, my peace of mind, and (since you tell me I may claim it) my glory.

PETRARCA.

Recovering your strength you must pursue your studies to complete it. What can you have been doing with your books? I have searched

in vain this morning for that treasury. Where are they kept? Formerly they were always open. I found only a short manuscript, which I suspect is poetry, but I ventured not on looking into it, until I had brought it with me and laid it before you.

BOCCACCIO.

Well guessed! They are verses written by a gentleman who resided long in this country, and who much regretted the necessity of leaving it. He took great delight in composing both latin and italian, but never kept a copy of them latterly, so that these are the only ones I could obtain from him. Read: for your voice will improve them.

TO MY CHILD CARLINO.

Carlino! what art thou about, my boy?
Often I ask that question, though in vain;
For we are far apart: ah! therefore 'tis
I often ask it; not in such a tone
As wiser fathers do, who know too well.
Were we not children, you and I together?

Stole we not glances from each other's eyes?
Swore we not secrecy in such misdeeds?
Well could we trust each other. Tell me, then,
What thou art doing. Carving out thy name,
Or haply mine, upon my favourite seat,
With the new knife I sent thee over-sea?
Or hast thou broken it, and hid the hilt
Among the myrtles, starr'd with flowers, behind?
Or under that high throne whence fifty lilies
(With sworded tuberoses dense around)
Lift up their heads at once...not without fear
That they were looking at thee all the while?
  Does Cincirillo follow thee about?
Inverting one swart foot suspensively,
And wagging his dread jaw, at every chirp
Of bird above him on the olive-branch?
Frighten him then away! 'twas he who slew
Our pigeons, our white pigeons, peacock-tailed,
That fear'd not you and me...alas, nor him!
I flattened his striped sides along my knee,
And reasoned with him on his bloody mind,
Till he looked blandly, and half-closed his eyes
To ponder on my lecture in the shade.
I doubt his memory much, his heart a little,

And in some minor matters (may I say it?)
Could wish him rather sager. But from thee
God hold back wisdom yet for many years!
Whether in early season or in late
It always comes high priced. For thy pure breast
I have no lesson; it for me has many.
Come, throw it open then! What sports, what cares
(Since there are none too young for these) engage
Thy busy thoughts? Are you again at work,
Walter and you, with those sly labourers,
Geppo, Giovanni, Cecco, and Poeta,
To build more solidly your broken dam
Among the poplars, whence the nightingale
Inquisitively watched you all day long?
I was not of your council in the scheme,
Or might have saved you silver without end,
And sighs too without number. Art thou gone
Below the mulberry, where that cold pool
Urged to devise a warmer, and more fit
For mighty swimmers, swimming three abreast?
Or art thou panting in this summer noon
Upon the lowest step before the hall,
Drawing a slice of watermelon, long
As Cupid's bow, athwart thy wetted lips

(Like one who plays Pan's pipe) and letting drop
The sable seeds from all their separate cells,
And leaving bays profound and rocks abrupt,
Redder than coral round Calypso's cave?

PETRARCA.

There have been those anciently who would have been pleased with such poetry, and perhaps there may be again. I am not sorry to see the Muses by the side of childhood, and forming a part of the family.

What is this at the end?

BOCCACCIO.

I am not quite certain that the author would have allowed you to read those. Indeed I had forgotten they were in the same paper. Although he was under no obligation to the House of Este, nor wished nor needed it, he felt at a distance the general joy which announced the destinies of the lady Victoria. This little poem is curious, as being the only one upon the occasion, which never left its native place for court

or croud, contented with one solitary aspiration. I think there are only two stanzas. My neighbour was able, without a wrench or a pother, to put into four or five verses, what another (yet hardy enough) brought cramps and pothooks to protract into a baker's dozen. Come, give me your voice again.

PETRARCA.

I will not look into the sky
To augur aught of future years:
Enough the heavens have shown us, why
Our hopes are sure, and vain our fears.

Victoria! thou art risen to save
The land thy earliest smiles have blest
A brave man's child will cheer the brave,
A tender mother's the distrest.

But now tell me about the books.

BOCCACCIO.

Resolving to lay aside the more valuable of those I had collected or transcribed, and to place them under the guardianship of richer men, I locked them up together in the higher

story of my tower at Certaldo. You remember the old tower?

PETRARCA.

Well do I remember the hearty laugh we had together (which stopped us upon the staircase) at the calculation we made, how much longer you and I, if we continued to thrive as we had thriven latterly, should be able to pass within its narrow circle. Although I like this little villa much better, I would gladly see the place again, and enjoy with you, as we did before, the vast expanse of woodlands and mountains and maremma; frowning fortresses, inexpugnable; and others more prodigious for their ruins; then below them, lordly abbeys, overcanopied with stately trees and girded with rich luxuriance; and towns that seem approaching them to do them honour, and villages nestling close at their sides for sustenance and protection.

BOCCACCIO.

My disorder, if it should keep its promise of

leaving me at last, will have been preparing me for the accomplishment of such a project. Should I get thinner and thinner at this rate, I shall soon be able to mount not only a turret or a bell-frey, but a tube of maccarone,* while a Neapolitan is suspending it for deglutition.

What I am about to mention, will show you how little you can relie on me! I have preserved the books, as you desired, but quite contrary to my resolution: and, no less contrary to it, by your desire, I shall now preserve the Decameron. In vain had I determined not only to mend in future, but to correct the past; in vain had I prayed most fervently for grace to accomplish it, with a final aspiration to Fiammetta that she would unite with your beloved Laura, and that, gentle and beatified spirits as they are,

* This is valuable, since it shows that *maccarone* (here called *pasta*) was invented in the time of Boccaccio; so are the letters of Petrarca, which inform us equally in regard to *spectacles.*, " Ad *ocularium* (occhiali) mihi confugiendum esset auxilium.

they would breathe together their purer prayers on mine. See what follows.

PETRARCA.

Sigh not at it. Before we can see all that follows from their intercession, we must join them again. But let me hear anything in which they are concerned.

BOCCACCIO.

I prayed; and my breast, after some few tears, grew calmer. Yet sleep did not ensue until the break of morning, when the dropping of soft rain on the leaves of the fig-tree at the window, and the chirping of a little bird, to tell another there was shelter under them, brought me repose and slumber. Scarcely had I closed my eyes, if indeed time can be reckoned any more in sleep than in heaven, when my Fiammetta seemed to have led me into the meadow. You will see it below you: turn away that branch: gently! gently! do not break it; for the little bird sat there.

PETRARCA.

I think, Giovanni, I can divine the place. Although this fig-tree, growing out of the wall between the cellar and us, is fantastic enough in its branches, yet that other which I see yonder, bent down and forced to crawl along the grass by the prepotence of the young shapely walnut-tree, is much more so. It forms a seat, about a cubit above the ground, level and long enough for several.

BOCCACCIO.

Ha! you fancy it must be a favourite spot with me, because of the two strong forked stakes wherewith it is propt and supported!

PETRARCA.

Poets know the haunts of poets at first sight; and he who loved Laura.. O Laura! did I say he who *loved* thee?.. hath whisperings where those feet would wander which have been restless after Fiammetta.

BOCCACCIO.

It is true, my imagination has often conducted

her thither; but here in this chamber she appeared to me more visibly in a dream.

"Thy prayers have been heard, O Giovanni," said she.

I sprang to embrace her.

"Do not spill the water! Ah! you have spilt a part of it."

I then observed in her hand a crystal vase. A few drops were sparkling on the sides and running down the rim: a few were trickling from the base and from the hand that held it.

"I must go down to the brook," said she, "and fill it again as it was filled before."

What a moment of agony was this to me! Could I be certain how long might be her absence? She went: I was following: she made a sign for me to turn back: I disobeyed her only an instant: yet my sense of disobedience, increasing my feebleness and confusion, made me lose sight of her. In the next moment she was again at my side, with the cup quite full. I stood motionless: I feared my breath

might shake the water over. I looked in her face for her commands. . and to see it . . to see it so calm, so beneficent, so beautiful. I was forgetting what I had prayed for, when she lowered her head, tasted of the cup, and gave it me. I drank: and suddenly sprang forth before me, many groves and palaces and gardens, and their statues and their avenues and their labyrinths of alaternus and bay, and alcoves of citron, and watchful loopholes in the retirements of impenetrable pomegranate. Farther off, just below where the fountain slipt away from its marble hall and guardian gods, arose, from their beds of moss and drosera and darkest grass, the sisterhood of oleanders, fond of tantalizing with their bosomed flowers and their moist and pouting blossoms the little shy rivulet, and of covering its face with all the colours of the dawn. My dream expanded and moved forward. I trod again the dust of Posilipo, soft as the feathers in the wings of Sleep: I emerged on Baia; I crossed her innumerable arches; I

loitered in the breezy sunshine of her mole; I trusted the faithful seclusion of her caverns, the keepers of so many secrets; and I reposed on the buoyancy of her tepid sea. Then Naples, and her theatres and her churches, and grottoes and dells and forts and promontories, rushed forward in confusion, now among soft whispers, now among sweetest sounds, and subsided, and sank, and disappeared. Yet a memory seemed to come fresh from every one: each had time enough for its tale, for its pleasure, for its reflection, for its pang. As I mounted with silent steps the narrow staircase of the old palace, how distinctly did I feel against the palm of my hand the coldness of that smooth stone-work, and the greater of the cramps of iron in it!

"Ah me! is this forgetting?" cried I, anxiously, to Fiammetta.

"We must recall these scenes before us," she replied: "such is the punishment of them. Let us hope and believe that the apparition, and the compunction which must follow it, will be

accepted as the full penalty, and that both will pass away almost together."

I feared to lose anything attendant on her presence: I feared to approach her forehead with my lips: I feared to touch the lily on its long wavy leaf in her hair, which filled my whole heart with fragrance. Venerating, adoring, I bowed my head at last to kiss her snow-white robe, and trembled at my presumption. And yet the effulgence of her countenance vivified while it chastened me. I loved her . . I must not say *more* than ever . . *better* than ever: it was Fiammetta who had inhabited the skies. As my hand opened toward hers,

"Beware!" said she, faintly smiling; "beware, Giovanni! Take only the crystal: take it, and drink again."

"Must all be then forgotten?" said I, sorrowfully.

"Remember your prayer, and mine, Giovanni! Shall both have been granted . . O how much worse than in vain?"

I drank instantly; I drank largely. How cool my bosom grew! how could it grow so cool before her! But it was not to remain in its quiescency; its trials were not yet over. I will not, Francesco! no, I may not commemorate the incidents she related to me, nor which of us said, "I blush for having loved *first*;" nor which of us replied "Say *least*, say *least*, and blush again."

The charm of the words (for I felt not the encumbrance of the body nor the acuteness of the spirit) seemed to possess me wholly. Although the water gave me strength and comfort, and somewhat of celestial pleasure, many tears fell around the border of the vase as she held it up before me, exhorting me to take courage, and inviting me with more than exhortation to accomplish my deliverance. She came nearer more tenderly, more earnestly: she held the dewy globe with both hands, leaning forward, and sighed and shook her head, drooping at my pusillanimity. It was only when a ringlet had touched the rim,

and perhaps the water (for a sun-beam on the surface could never have given it such a golden hue) that I took courage, clasped it, and exhausted it. Sweet as was the water, sweet as was the serenity it gave me . . alas! that also which it moved away from me was sweet!

"This time you can trust me alone," said she, and parted my hair, and kissed my brow. Again she went toward the brook: again my agitation, my weakness, my doubt, came over me: nor could I see her while she raised the water, nor knew I whence she drew it. When she returned, she was close to me at once: she smiled: her smile pierced me to the bones: it seemed an angel's. She sprinkled the pure water on me; she looked most fondly; she took my hand; she suffered me to press hers to my bosom; but, whether by design I cannot tell, she let fall a few drops of the chilly element between.

"And now, O my beloved!" said she, "we have consigned to the bosom of God our earthly

joys and sorrows. The joys cannot return, let not the sorrows. These alone would trouble my repose among the blessed."

"Trouble thy repose! Fiammetta! Give me the chalice!" cried I .. "not a drop will I leave in it, not a drop."

"Take it!" said that soft voice. "O now, most dear Giovanni! I knew thou hast strength enough; and there is but little . . at the bottom lies our first kiss."

"Mine! didst thou say, beloved one? and is that left thee still?"

"*Mine*, said she, pensively; and, as she abased her head, the broad leaf of the lily hid her brow and her eyes; the light of heaven shone through the flower."

"O Fiammetta! Fiammetta!" cried I in agony, "God is the God of mercy, God is the God of love .. can I, can I ever?" I struck the chalice against my head, unmindful that I held it; the water covered my face and my feet. I

started up, not yet awake, and I heard the name of Fiammetta in the curtains.

PETRARCA.

Love, O Giovanni, and life itself, are but dreams at best. I do think

> Never so gloriously was Sleep attended
> As with the pageant of that heavenly maid.

But to dwell on such objects is sinful. The recollection of them, with all their vanities, brings tears into my eyes.

BOCCACCIO.

And into mine too . . they were so very charming.

PETRARCA.

Alas, alas! the time always comes when we must regret the enjoyments of our youth.

BOCCACCIO.

If we have let them pass us.

PETRARCA.

I mean our indulgence in them.

BOCCACCIO.

Francesco! I think you must remember Raffaellino degli Alfani.

PETRARCA.

Was it Raffaellino who lived near San Michele in Orto?

BOCCACCIO.

The same. He was an innocent soul, and fond of fish. But whenever his friend Sabbatelli sent him a trout from Pratolino, he always kept it until next day or the day after, just long enough to render it unpalatable. He then turned it over in the platter, smelt at it closer, although the news of its condition came undeniably from a distance, touched it with his forefinger, solicited a testimony from the gills which the eyes had contradicted, sighed over it, and sent it for a present to somebody else. Were I a lover of trout as Raffaellino was, I think I should have taken an opportunity of enjoying it while the pink and crimson were glittering on it.

PETRARCA.

Trout, yes.

BOCCACCIO.

And all other fish I could encompass.

PETRARCA.

O thou grave mocker! I did not suspect such slyness in thee: proof enough I had almost forgotten thee!

BOCCACCIO.

Listen! listen! I fancied I caught a footstep in the passage. Come nearer; bend your head lower, that I may whisper a word in your ear. Never let Assunta hear you sigh. She is mischievous: she may have been standing at the door: not that I believe she would be guilty of any such impropriety: but who knows what girls are capable of! She has no malice, only in laughing; and a sigh sets her windmill at work, van over van, incessantly.

PETRARCA.

I should soon check her: I have no notion . . .

BOCCACCIO.

After all, she is a good girl . . a trifle of the wilful. She must have it that many things are hurtful to me . . reading in particular . . it makes people so odd. Tina is a small matter of the madcap . . in her own particular way . . but exceedingly discreet, I do assure you, if they will only leave her alone.

I find I was mistaken, there was nobody.

PETRARCA.

A cat, perhaps.

BOCCACCIO.

No such thing. I order him over to Certaldo, while the birds are laying and sitting: and he knows by experience, favourite as he is, that it is of no use to come back before he is sent for. Since the first impetuosities of youth, he has rarely been refractory or disobliging. We have lived together now these five years, unless I miscalculate ; and he seems to have learnt something of my manners, wherein violence and enterprize by no means predominate. I have

watched him looking at a large green lizard; and, their eyes being opposite and near, he has doubted whether it might be pleasing to me if he began the attack; and their tails on a sudden have touched one another at the decision.

PETRARCA.

Seldom have adverse parties felt the same desire of peace at the same moment, and none ever carried it more simultaneously and promptly into execution.

BOCCACCIO.

He enjoys his otium cum dignitate at Certaldo: there he is my castellan, and his chase is unlimited in those domains. After the doom of relegation is expired, he comes hither at midsummer. And then if you could see his joy! His eyes are as deep as a well, and as clear as a fountain: he jerks his tail into the air like a royal sceptre, and waves it like the wand of a magician. You would fancy that, as Horace with his head,—he was about to smite the stars with it. There is ne'er such another cat in the

parish; and he knows it, a rogue! We have rare repasts together in the bean-and-bacon time, although in regard to the bean he sides with the philosopher of Samos; but after due examination. In cleanliness he is a very nun; albeit in that quality which lies between cleanliness and godliness, there is a smack of Fra Biagio about him. What is that book in your hand?

PETRARCA.

My breviary.

BOCCACCIO.

Well, give me mine too . . there, on the little table in the corner, under the glass of primroses. We can do nothing better.

PETRARCA.

What prayer were you looking for? let me find it.

BOCCACCIO.

I don't know how it is: I am scarcely at present in a frame of mind for it. We are of one faith: the prayers of the one will do for the

other: and I am sure, if you omitted my name, you would say them all over afresh. I wish you could recollect in any book as dreamy a thing to entertain me as I have been just repeating. We have had enough of Dante: I believe few of his beauties have escaped us: and small faults, which we readily pass by, are fitter for small folks, as grubs are the proper bait for gudgeons.

PETRARCA.

I have had as many dreams as most men. We are all made up of them, as the webs of the spider are particles of her own vitality. But how infinitely less do we profit by them! I will relate to you, before we separate, one among the multitude of mine, as coming the nearest to the poetry of yours, and as having been not totally useless to me. Often have I reflected on it; sometimes with pensiveness, with sadness never.

BOCCACCIO.

Then, Francesco, if you had with you as co-

pious a choice of dreams as clustered on the elm-trees where the Sibyl led Eneas, this, in preference to the whole swarm of them, is the queen dream for me.

PETRARCA.

When I was younger I was fond of wandering in solitary places, and never was afraid of slumbering in woods and grottoes. Among the chief pleasures of my life, and among the commonest of my occupations, was the bringing before me such heroes and heroines of antiquity, such poets and sages, such of the prosperous and of the unfortunate, as most interested me, by their courage, their wisdom, their eloquence, or their adventures. Engaging them in the conversations best suited to their characters, I knew perfectly their manners, their steps, their voices: and often did I moisten with my tears the models I had been forming of the less happy.

BOCCACCIO.

Great is the privilege of entering into the studies of the intellectual; great is that of con-

versing with the guides of nations, the movers of the mass, the regulators of the unruly will, stiff in its impurity and rust against the finger of the Almighty Power that formed it: but give me, Francesco, give me rather the creature to sympathize with; apportion me the sufferings to assuage. Ah, gentle soul! thou wilt never send them over to another; they have better hopes from thee.

PETRARCA.

We both alike feel the sorrows of those around us. He who suppresses or allays them in another, breaks many thorns off his own; and future years will never harden fresh ones.

My occupation was not always in making the politician talk politics, the orator toss his torch among the populace, the philosopher run down from philosophy to cover the retreat or the advances of his sect; but sometimes in devising how such characters must act and discourse, on subjects far remote from the beaten track of their career. In like manner the philologist, and

again the dialectician, were not indulged in the review and parade of their trained bands, but, at times, brought forward to show in what manner and in what degree external habits had influenced the conformation of the internal man. It was far from unprofitable to set passing events before past actors, and to record the decisions of those whose interests and passions are unconcerned in them.

BOCCACCIO.

This is surely no easy matter. The thoughts are in fact your own, however you distribute them.

PETRARCA.

All cannot be my own; if you mean by *thoughts* the opinions and principles I should be the most desirous to inculcate. Some favourite ones perhaps may obtrude too prominently, but otherwise no misbehaviour is permitted them: reprehension and rebuke are always ready, and the offence is punished on the spot.

BOCCACCIO.

Certainly you thus throw open, to its full extent, the range of poetry and invention; which cannot but be very limited and sterile, unless where we find displayed much diversity of character as disseminated by nature, much peculiarity of sentiment as arising from position, marked with unerring skill through every shade and gradation; and finally and chiefly, much intertexture and intensity of passion. You thus convey to us more largely and expeditiously the stores of your understanding and imagination, than you ever could by sonnets or canzonets, or sinewless and sapless allegories.

But weightier works are less captivating. If you had published any such as you mention, you must have waited for their acceptance. Not only the fame of Marcellus, but every other,

> Crescit occulto velut arbor ævo;

and that which makes the greatest vernal shoot is apt to make the least autumnal. Authors in

general who have had celebrity at starting, have already had their reward; always their utmost due, and often much beyond it. We cannot hope for both celebrity and fame: supremely fortunate are the few who are allowed the liberty of choice between them. We two prefer the strength that springs from exercise and toil, acquiring it gradually and slowly. We leave to others the earlier blessing of that sleep which follows enjoyment. How many at first sight are enthusiastic in their favour! Of these how large a portion come away empty-handed and discontented! like idlers who visit the seacoast, fill their pockets with pebbles bright from the passing wave, and carry them off with rapture. After a short examination at home, every streak seems faint and dull, and the whole contexture coarse, uneven, and gritty: first one is thrown away, then another; and before the week's end the store is gone, of things so shining and wonderful.

PETRARCA.

Allegory, which you named, with sonnets and canzonets, had few attractions for me, believing it to be the delight, in general, of idle, frivolous, inexcursive minds, in whose mansions there is neither hall nor portal to receive the loftier of the Passions. A stranger to the Affections, she holds a low station among the hand-maidens of Poetry, being fit for little but an apparition in a mask. I had reflected for some time on this subject, when, wearied with the length of my walk over the mountains, and finding a soft old mole-hill, covered with grey grass, by the way-side, I laid my head upon it, and slept. I cannot tell how long it was before a species of dream or vision came over me.

Two beautiful youths appeared beside me; each was winged; but the wings were hanging down, and seemed ill adapted to flight. One of them, whose voice was the softest I ever heard, looking at me frequently, said to the other,

"He is under my guardianship for the present: do not awaken him with that feather."

Methought, on hearing the whisper, I saw something like the feather on an arrow; and then the arrow itself; the whole of it, even to the point; although he carried it in such a manner that it was difficult at first to discover more than a palm's length of it: the rest of the shaft, and the whole of the barb, was behind his ankles.

"This feather never awakens any one," replied he, rather petulantly; "but it brings more of confident security, and more of cherished dreams, than you without me are capable of imparting."

"Be it so!" answered the gentler. . "none is less inclined to quarrel or dispute than I am. Many whom you have wounded grievously, call upon me for succour. But so little am I disposed to thwart you, it is seldom I venture to do more for them than to whisper a few words of comfort in passing. How many reproaches

on these occasions have been cast upon me for indifference and infidelity! Nearly as many, and nearly in the same terms, as upon you!"

"Odd enough that we, O Sleep! should be thought so alike!" said Love, contemptuously. "Yonder is he who bears a nearer resemblance to you: the dullest have observed it." I fancied I turned my eyes to where he was pointing, and saw at a distance the figure he designated. Meanwhile the contention went on uninterruptedly. Sleep was slow in asserting his power or his benefits. Love recapitulated them; but only that he might assert his own above them. Suddenly he called on me to decide, and to choose my patron. Under the influence, first of the one, then of the other, I sprang from repose to rapture, I alighted from rapture on repose . . and knew not which was sweetest. Love was very angry with me, and declared he would cross me throughout the whole of my existence. Whatever I might on other occasions have thought of his veracity, I now felt too surely

the conviction that he would keep his word. At last, before the close of the altercation, the third Genius had advanced, and stood near us. I cannot tell how I knew him, but I knew him to be the Genius of Death. Breathless as I was at beholding him, I soon became familiar with his features. First they seemed only calm; presently they grew contemplative; and lastly beautiful: those of the Graces themselves are less regular, less harmonious, less composed. Love glanced at him unsteddily, with a countenance in which there was somewhat of anxiety, somewhat of disdain; and cried, "Go away! go away! nothing that thou touchest, lives."

"Say rather, child! "replied the advancing form, and, advancing, grew loftier and statelier, "Say rather that nothing of beautiful or of glorious lives its own true life until my wing hath passed over it."

Love pouted, and rumpled and bent down with his forefinger the stiff short feathers on his arrow-head; but replied not. Although he

frowned worse than ever, and at me, I dreaded him less and less, and scarcely looked toward him. The milder and calmer Genius, the third, in proportion as I took courage to contemplate him, regarded me with more and more complacency. He held neither flower nor arrow, as the others did; but, throwing back the clusters of dark curls that overshadowed his countenance, he presented to me his hand, openly and benignly. I shrank on looking at him so near, and yet I sighed to love him. He smiled, not without an expression of pity, at perceiving my diffidence, my timidity: for I remembered how soft was the hand of Sleep, how warm and entrancing was Love's. By degrees, I grew ashamed of my ingratitude; and turning my face away, I held out my arms, and felt my neck within his. Composure strewed and allayed all the throbbings of my bosom; the coolness of freshest morning breathed around; the heavens seemed to open above me; while the beautiful cheek of my deliverer rested on my head. I

would now have looked for those others; but knowing my intention by my gesture, he said, consolatorily,

"Sleep is on his way to the Earth, where many are calling him; but it is not to these he hastens: for every call only makes him fly farther off. Sedately and gravely as he looks, he is nearly as capricious and volatile as the more arrogant and ferocious one."

"And Love!" said I, "whither is he departed? If not too late, I would propitiate and appease him."

"He who cannot follow me, he who cannot overtake and pass me," said the Genius, "is unworthy of the name, the most glorious in earth or heaven. Look up! Love is yonder . . and ready to receive thee."

I looked: the earth was under me: I saw only the clear blue sky . . . and something brighter above it.

THE END.

PIEVANO GRIGI

TO THE READER.

Before I proceeded on my mission, I had a final audience of Monsignore, in which I asked his counsel, whether a paper sewed and pasted to the *Interviews*, being the substance of an intended *Confession*, might, according to the *Decretals*, be made public. Monsignore took the subject into his consideration, and assented. Previously to the solution of this question, he was graciously pleased to discourse on Boccaccio, and to say, "I am happy to think he died a good catholic, and contentedly."

"No doubt, Monsignore!" answered I, "for when he was on his deathbed, or a little sooner, the most holy man in Italy admonished him terribly of his past transgressions, and frightened him fairly into paradise."

"Pievano!" said Monsignore, "it is customary in the fashionable literature of our times to finish a story in two manners. The most approved is, to knock on the head every soul that has been interesting you: the second is, to put the two youngest into bed together, promising the same treatment to another couple, or more. Our forefathers were equally zealous about those they dealt with. Every pagan turned christian: every loose woman had bark to grow about her, as thick and astringent as the ladies had in Ovid's Metamorphoses; and the gallants, who had played false with them, were driven mad by the monks at their deathbed. I neither hope nor believe that poor Boccaccio gave way to their importunities, but am happy in thinking that his decease was as tranquil as his life was inoffensive. He was not exempt from the indiscretions of youth: he allowed his imagination too long a dalliance with his passions; but malice was never found among them. Let us then, in charity to him

and to ourselves, be persuaded that such a pest as this mad zealot had no influence over him,

> Nè turbò il tuono di ncbbiosa mente
> Acqua si limpida e ridente.*

I cannot but break into verse, although no poet, while I am thinking of him. Such men as he, would bring over more to our good-natured honest old faith again, than fifty monks with scourges at their shoulders."

"Ah Monsignore!" answered I, "could I but hope to be humbly instrumental in leading back the apostate church to our true catholic, I should be the happiest man alive."

"God forbid you should be without the hope!" said Monsignore. "The two chief differences now are; with ours, that we must not eat butcher's meat on a Friday; with the Anglican, that they must not eat baked meat on a Sunday. Secondly, that we say, *Come, and*

* Nor did the thunderings of a cloudy mind
Trouble so limpid and serene a water.

be saved: the Anglican says, *Go, and be damned.*"

Since the exposition of Monsignore, the Parliament has issued an Act of Grace in regard to eating. One article says,

"Nobody shall eat on a Sunday, roast or baked or other hot victuals whatsoever, unless he goes to church in his own carriage; if he goes thither in any other than his own, be he halt or blind, he shall be subject to the penalty of twenty pounds."

"Nobody shall dance on a Sunday, or play music, unless he also be able to furnish three *ecartez* tables, at the least, and sixteen wax-lights." I write from memory; but if the wording is inexact, the sense is accurate. Nothing can be more gratifying to a true catholic, than to see the amicable game played by his bishops with the Anglican. The catholic never makes a false move. His fish often slips into the red square, marked *Sunday,* but the shoulder of mutton can never get into its place, marked

Friday: it lies upon the table and nobody dares touch it. Alas! I am forgetting that this is purely an English game, and utterly unknown among us, or indeed in any other country under heaven.

To promote still further the objects of religion, as understood in the Universities and the Parliament, it was proposed that public prayers should be offered up for rain on every sabbath-day, the more effectually to encompass the provisions of the Bill. But this clause was cancelled in the Committee, on the examination of a groom, who deposed that a coach-horse of his master's, the bishop of London, was touched in the wind, and might be seriously a sufferer: "*for the bishop*," said he, "*is no better walker than a goose.*"

Never since the Reformation (so called) have our prospects been so bright as at the present day. Our own prelates, and those of the English church, are equally at work to the same effect; and the catholic clergy will come into

possession of their churches, with as little change in the temporals as in the spirituals. It is the law of the land that the church cannot lose her rights and possessions by lapse of time; impossible then that she should lose it by fraud and fallacy. Although the bishops of England, regardless of their vocations and vows, have, by deceit and falsehood, obtained acts of parliament, under the sanction of which they have severed from their sees, and made over to their families, the possessions of the episcopacy, it cannot be questioned that what has been wrongfully alienated will be rightfully restored. No time, no trickery, no subterfuge, can conceal it. The exposure of such thievery in such eminent stations, worse and more shameful than any on the Thames, or in the lowest haunts of villany and prostitution, and of attempts to seize from their poorer brethren a few decimals, to fill up a deficiency in many thousands, has opened wide the eyes of England. Consequently, there are religious men who resort from all quarters

to the persecuted mother they had so long abandoned. God at last has made his enemies perform his work: and the English prelates, not indeed on the stool of repentance, as would befit them, but thrust by the scorner into his uneasy chair, are mending with scarlet silk, and seaming with threads of gold, the copes and dalmatics of their worthy predecessors. I am overjoyed in declaring to my townsmen, that the recent demeanour of these prelates, refractory and mutinous as it has been (in other matters) to the government of their patron the king, has ultimately, (by joining the malcontents in abolishing the favourite farce of religious freedom, and in forbidding roast meat and country air on the sabbath) filled up my subscription for the bell of San Vivaldo.

Salve Regina Cœli!

Prete Domenico Grigi.

London, June 17th, 1837.

HEADS OF CONFESSION; A MONTHFUL.

Printed and Published Superiorum Licentiâ.

March 14.—Being ill at ease, I cried, "*Diavolo! I wish that creaking shutter was at thy bedroom, instead of mine, old fellow!* Assuntina would have composed me, showing me how wrong it was. Perverse; and would not acknowledge my sinfulness to her. I said she had nothing to do with it; which vexed her.

March 23.—Reproved Assuntina, and called her *ragazzaccia!* for asking of Messer Piero Pimperna half the evening's milk of his goat. Very wrong in me; it being impossible she should have known that Messer Piero owed me four *lire* since . . I forget when.

March 31.—It blowing tramontana, I was

ruffled: suspected a feather in the minestra: said the rice was as black as a coal. Sad falsehood! made Assuntina cry.. Saracenic doings.

RECAPITULATION.

Shameful all this month: I did not believe such bad humour was in me.

REFLECTION.

The devil, if he cannot have his walk one way, will take it another; never at a fault. Manifold proof; poor sinner!

April 2.—Thought uncharitably of Fra Biagio. The Frate took my hand, asking me to confess, reminding me that I had not confessed since the 3rd of March, although I was so sick and tribulated I could hardly stir. Peevish; said, "*Confess yourself: I won't: I am not minded: you will find those not far off who—*" and then I dipped my head under the coverlit, and saw my error.

April 6.—Whispers of Satanasso; pretty clear! A sprinkling of vernal thoughts, much

too advanced for the season. About three hours before sunset, Francesco came. Forgot my prayers; woke at midnight; recollected, and did not say them. Might have told him: never occurred that, being a Canonico, he could absolve me: now gone again these three days, this being the fourteenth. Must unload ere heavier-laden. Gratiæ plena! have mercy upon me!

THE TRANSLATOR'S REMARKS

ON THE ALLEGED JEALOUSY OF BOCCACCIO AND PETRARCA.

Among the most heinous crimes that can be committed against society, is the

temerati* crimen amici,

and no other so loosens the bonds by which it is held together. Once and only once in my life, I heard it defended by a person of intellect and integrity. It was the argument of a friendly man, who would have invalidated the fact: it was the solicitude of a prompt and dexterous man holding up his hat to cover the shame of genius. I have indeed had evidence of some who saw nothing extraordinary or amiss in these filchings and twitchings; but there are persons

whose thermometer stands higher by many degrees at other points than at honour. There are insects on the shoals and sands of literature, shrimps which must be half-boiled before they redden; and there are blushes (no doubt) in certain men, of which the precious vein lies so deep, that it could hardly be brought to light by cordage and windlass. Meanwhile their watchfulness shows itself at once by a plashy and puffy superficies, with an exuberance of coarse rough stuff upon it, and is ready to soak our shoes with its puddle at the first pressure.

"*Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour*" is a commandment which the literary cast down from over their communion-table, to nail against the doors of the commonalty, with a fist and forefinger pointing at it. Although the depreciation of any work is dishonest, the attempt is more infamous when committed against a friend. The calumniator on such occasions may in some measure err from ignorance, or from inadequate information,

but nothing can excuse him if he speaks contemptuously. It is impossible to believe that such writers as Boccaccio and Petrarca could be widely erroneous in each other's merits: no less incredible is it that, if they did err at all, they would openly avow a disparaging opinion. This baseness was reserved for days when the study opens into the market-place, when letters are commodities, and authors chapmen. Yet even upon their stalls, where an antique vase would stand little chance with a noticeable piece of blue-and-white crockery, and shepherds and sailors and sunflowers in its circumference, it might be heartily and honestly derided; but less probably by the fellow-villager of the vendor, with whom he had been playing at quoits every day of his life. When an ill-natured story is once launched upon the world, there are many who are careful that it shall not soon founder. Thus the idle and inconsiderate rumour, which has floated through ages, about the mutual jealousy of Boccaccio and Petrarca, finds at this

day a mooring in all quarters. Never were two men so perfectly formed for friendship; never were two who fulfilled so completely that happy destination. True it is, the studious and exact Petrarca, had not elaborated so entirely to his own satisfaction his poem of *Africa* as to submit it yet to the inspection of Boccaccio, to whom unquestionably he would have been delighted to show it the moment he had finished it. He died, and left it incomplete. We have, it must be acknowledged, the authority of Petrarca himself, that he never had redd the *Decameron* through, even to the last year of his life, when he had been intimate with Boccaccio four-and-twenty. How easy would it have been for him to dissemble this fact! how certainly would any man have dissembled it who doubted of his own heart or of his friend's! I must request the liberty of adducing his whole letter, as already translated.

"I have only run over your *Decameron*, and

therefore I am not capable of forming a true judgment of its merit: but upon the whole it has given me a great deal of pleasure. *The freedoms in it are excusable; from having been written in youth, from the subjects it treats of, and from the persons for whom it was designed.* Among a great number of gay and witty jokes, there are however many grave and serious sentiments. I did as most people do: I paid most attention to the beginning and the end. Your description of the people [in the Plague] is very true and pathetic: and the touching story of Griseldis has *been ever since laid up in my memory, that I may relate it in my conversations with my friends.* A friend of mine at Padua, a man of wit and knowledge, undertook to read it aloud; but he had scarcely got through half of it, when his tears prevented him going on. He attempted it a second time; but his sobs and sighs obliged him to desist. Another of my friends determined on the same venture;

and, having redd it from beginning to end, without the least alteration of voice or gesture, he said, on returning the book,

" 'It must be owned this is an affecting history, and I should have wept, could I have believed it true; but there never was, and never will be, a woman like Griseldis.' "

Here was the termination of Petrarca's literary life: he closed it with the last words of this letter; which are, "*Adieu, my friends! adieu, my correspondence.*" Soon afterward he was found dead in his library, with his arm leaning on a book. In the whole of this composition, what a carefulness and solicitude to say everything that could gratify his friend; with what ingenuity are those faults not palliated but *excused* (his own expression) which must nevertheless have appeared very grievous ones to the purity of Petrarca.

But why did not Boccaccio send him his *Decameron* long before? Because there never was a more perfect gentleman, a man more fearful

of giving offence, a man more sensitive to the delicacy of friendship, or more deferential to sanctity of character. He knew that the lover of Laura could not amuse his hours with mischievous or idle passions; he knew that he rose at midnight to repeat his matins, and never intermitted them. On what succeeding hour could he venture to seize? with what countenance could he charge it with the levities of the world? Perhaps the Recluse of Arqua, the visiter of old Certaldo, redd at last the Decameron, only that he might be able the better to defend it. And how admirably has the last stroke of his indefatigable pen effected the purpose! Is this the jealous rival? Boccaccio received the final testimony of unaltered friendship in the month of October 1373; a few days after the writer's death. December was not over when they met in heaven.. and never were two gentler spirits united there.

The character of Petrarca shows itself in almost every one of his various works. Unsus-

picious, generous, ardent in study, in liberty, in love, with a self-complacence which in less men would be vanity, but arising in him from the general admiration of a noble presence, from his place in the interior of a heart which no other could approach or merit, and from the homage of all who held the principalities of Learning in every part of Europe.

Boccaccio is only reflected in full from a larger mass of compositions: yet one letter is quite sufficient to display the beauty and purity of his mind. It was written from Venice, when finding there not Petrarca whom he expected to find, but Petrarca's daughter, he describes to the father her modesty, grace, and cordiality in his reception. The imagination can form to itself nothing more lovely than his picture of the gentle Ermessinda: and Boccaccio's delicacy and gratitude are equally affecting. No wonder that Petrarca, in his will, bequeathed to his friend a sum the quintuple in amount of that which he bequeathed to his only brother, whom however he loved tenderly. Such had been,

long before their acquaintance, the celebrity of Petrarca, such the honours conferred on him wherever he resided or appeared, that he never thought of equality or rivalry. And such was Boccaccio's reverential modesty, that, to the very close of his life, he called Petrarca his master. Immeasurable as was his own superiority, he no more thought himself the equal of Petrarca, than Dante (in whom the superiority was almost as great) thought himself Virgil's. These, I believe, are the only instances on record, where poets have been very tenaciously erroneous in the estimate of their own inferiority. The same observation cannot be made so confidently on the decisions of contemporary critics. Indeed the balance in which works of the highest merit are weighed, vibrates long before it is finally adjusted. Even the most judicious men have formed injudicious opinions on the living and the recently deceased. Bacon and Hooker could not estimate Shakspeare, nor could Taylor and Barrow give Milton his just award. Cowley and Dryden were preferred to both, by a great

majority of the learned. Many, although they believe they discover in a contemporary the qualities which elevate him above the rest, yet hesitate to acknowledge it; part, because they are fearful of censure for singularity, part, because they differ from him in politics or religion, and part, because they delight in hiding, like dogs and foxes, what they can at any time surreptitiously draw out for their sullen solitary repast. Such persons have little delight in the glory of our country, and would hear with disapprobation and moroseness it has produced four men so pre-eminently great, that no name, modern or ancient, can stand very near the lowest: these are, Shakspeare, Bacon, Milton, and Newton. Beneath the least of these (if any one can tell which is least) are Homer and Aristoteles; who are unquestionably the next. Out of Greece and England, Dante is the only man of the first order; such he is, with all his imperfections. Less ardent and energetic, but having no less at

command the depths of thought and treasures of fancy, beyond him in variety, animation, and interest, beyond him in touches of nature and truth of character, is Boccaccio. Yet he believed his genius was immeasurably inferior to Alighieri's; and it would have surprised and pained him to find himself preferred to his friend Petrarca; which indeed did not happen in his lifetime. So difficult is it to shake the tenure of long possession, or to believe that a living man is as valuable as an old statue, that for five hundred years together the critics held Virgil far above his obsequious but high-souled scholar, who now has at least the honour of standing alone, if not first. Milton and Homer may be placed together: on the continent Homer will be seen at the right hand; in England, Milton. Supreme, above all, immeasurably supreme, stands Shakspeare. I do not think Dante is any more the equal of Homer than Hercules is the equal of Apollo. Though Hercules may display more muscles, yet Apollo is the powerfuller

without any display of them at all. Both together are just equivalent to Milton, shorn of his sonnets, and of his *Allegro* and *Penseroso*; the most delightful of what (wanting a better name) we call *lyrical* poems. But in the contemplation of these prodigies we must not lose the company we entered with. Two contemporaries so powerful in interesting our best affections, as Giovanni and Francesco, never existed before or since. Petrarca was honored and beloved by all conditions. He collated with the student and investigator, he planted with the husbandman, he was the counsellor of kings, the reprover of pontiffs, and the pacificator of nations. Boccaccio, who never had occasion to sigh for solitude, never sighed *in* it: there was his station, there his studies, there his happiness. In the vivacity and versatility of imagination, in the narrative, in the descriptive, in the playful, in the pathetic, the world never saw his equal, until the sunrise of our Shak-

speare. Ariosto and Spenser may stand at no great distance from him in the shadowy and unsubstantial; but multiform Man was utterly unknown to them. The human heart, through all its foldings, vibrates to Boccaccio.

THE

PENTALOGIA;

OR

FIVE DRAMATIC SCENES.

TO ROBERT SOUTHEY, Esq. LL.D.

&c. &c. &c.

You and two others will read these dramatic scraps with pleasure.

Jam satis terris :

You are almost the only public man, of either party, whom I would give a farthing to please by anything I write. But never shall I cease to eulogise those of either, who are friends to liberal economy, fair conciliation, and watchful peace.

I publish no more in my lifetime. I may, however, throw off my fingers'-ends a few drops

to lay the dust; a few to make the point-lace lie closer on the lawn, which others must wash and mend. As you will not enter the laundry or tire-room with me, pray accept these lumps of sugar-candy, to remove any bitterness left in the mouth by the astringency of my conservatism.

I never write more than a scene or two of the same drama, giving too short a hold for the rabble to seize and pull at; one calling me quaint, another pushing unlucky Canning against me.

In all this licentiousness of electioneering, the worst that has happened to me from our light-fingered literators, is an ineffectual tug at my seals (with a trifle of scurrility) by an Irishman out of place, and a kick on the skin (between two compliments) by his Scotch associate.

While the smile is on your lips, adieu! God bless you.

W. S. L.

FIVE DRAMATIC SCENES.

ESSEX AND BACON.

Essex. I did believe, sir, I had helpt to raise
Many to wealth and station, some to fame,
And one to friendship.
Bacon. You, my noble earl,
Have done it; and much more. We must lament
A power thus past (or rather thrown) away.
Essex. Thou? thou lament it, Bacon?
Bacon. To my soul.
Essex. Why then, with energy beyond the pitch
Of brawling law, cry vengeance? when my fortune
Was pierced with every bolt from every hand,
Soon as the golden links were snapt asunder
Which those who rule the earth held round that bird

Who bore their lightnings and struck down their foes.

Bacon. My gracious lŏrd! were always their commands

Well waited for?

Essex. Nay, by my troth, my zeal

Outflew them.

Bacon. Your return was unadvised.

Essex. Unwelcome: that is worse.

Bacon. The worst of all

Was summoning to arms a loyal land,

Basking in peace and plenteousness.

Essex. How far

Extended this your basking? court indeed

And inns of law were warm enough; on those

The sun beats all the day, through all the year;

Everything there so still and orderly,

That he who sneezes in them is caught up

And cudgell'd for his pains

Bacon. Should he awake

Trumpets by sneezing, should he blow up banners,

'Twere well if only cudgels fell on him:

Our laws have sharper instruments, my lord!

Essex. I know it; and I knew it ere I rose.

Bacon. O! had this never happened!

Essex. Then wouldst thou

Have lost some smiles, some parlyings, some tags
Of ermine, and, what more thou valuest
(As any wise man would) some little gold.

Bacon. Dross!

Essex (*smiling*). Very true! . . as men are dust and ashes.

Bacon. Such thoughts become all mortals; most of all
Those who have fallen under high displeasure,
Who have their God and Prince to reconcile,
And are about to change this brief vile life . . .
Nay, nay, my lord! your life may rest unchanged
For years to come, if you, upon your knees,
Humbly ask pardon . .

Essex (*fiercely*). Pardon!

(*After hesitation.*) I will ask it . .

Bacon . . Before the privy council, and the court
Especially assembled.

Essex (*indignantly*). Not before
The best among them, were he quite alone,
No, by the soul of Essex! were he Raleigh . .
The only great man there.

Bacon. Are we so scorned?

Essex. Bacon! I did not say the only wise one:
So, do not break thy ring, or loose the stone.

Bacon. My lord! my finger might have been uneasy
Without such notice from that once high peer
Erewhile the Earl of Essex . . until treason
Leveled him lower than burgess or than churl.

Essex. I will not say thou liest; for thy tongue
Lags far behind thy heart; thy strongest wit
May stretch and strain, but never make them yoke-mates.

Bacon. This cork appliance, this hard breathing, served
While there was water under for support,
But cut a dismal figure in the mud.

Essex. To servile souls how abject seem the fallen!
Benchers and message-bearers stride o'er Essex!

Bacon. Unmasted pinnace may row safely under
No high colossus, without pricking it.
But, sure, the valiant Earl is somewhat chafed . .
Who could have thought it! . . by a worm like me!

Essex. Begone! I have fairly weighed thee.

Bacon (*alone*). He weigh me!
No man is stout enough* to trim the balance,

* Bacon little knew or suspected that there was then existing (the only one that ever did exist) his superior

Much less to throw the weight in . .

He weigh me !

Flaunting and brittle as a honeysuckle,
Sweet in the chamber, in the field blown down,
Ramping in vain to reach again its prop,
And crusht by the first footfall.

Arrogance

Stares, but sees badly . . snatches with quick gripe
What seems within the reach, and, being infirm
Of stand, is overbalanced.

Shall I bear

Foul words upon me ?

I have thrown them back

Manfully to the beard that wagged with them . .

in intellectual power. Position gives magnitude. While the world was rolling above Shakspeare, he was seen imperfectly : when he rose above the world, it was discovered that he was greater than the world. The most honest of his contemporaries would scarcely have admitted this, even had they known it. But vast objects of remote altitude must be looked at a long while before they are ascertained. Ages are the telescope-tubes that must be lengthened out for Shakspeare ; and generations of men serve but as single witnesses to his claims.

My courage is now safe beyond suspicion . .
Myself can hardly doubt it after this . .
Yet that audacious criminal dared spit
Reproaches! seldom are they bearable,
But, springing up from reason, sting like asps . .
Not that the man has reason . . he has none . .
For, what had I to do with it? I spoke . .
And, when we are commanded, we must speak.
It was her Grace . . and surely she knows best.
I may now wash my hands of him at last,
I have but done my duty . . fall who may.

WALTER TYRREL

AND

WILLIAM RUFUS.

Rufus. Tyrrel, spur onward! we must not await
The laggard lords: when they have heard the dogs
I warrant they will follow fast enough,
Each for his haunch. Thy roan is mettlesome;
How the rogue sidles up to me, and claims
Acquaintance with young Yorkshire! not afraid
Of wrinkling lip, nor ear laid down like grass
By summer thunder-shower on Windsor mead.

Tyrrel. Behold, my liege! hither, they troop amain,
Over yon gap.

Rufus. Over my pales! the dolts
Have broken down my pales!

Tyrrel. Please you, my liege,
Unless they had, they must have ridden round
Eleven miles.

Rufus. Why not have ridden round
Eleven miles? or twenty, were there need.
By our Lady! they shall be our carpenters
And mend what they have marred. At any time
I can make fifty lords; but who can make
As many head of deer, if mine escape?
And sure they will, unless they too are mad.
Call me that bishop . . him with hunting-cap
Surcharged with cross, and scarlet above knee.

Tyrrel (galloping forward.) Ho! my lord bishop!

Bishop. Who calls me?

Tyrrel. Your slave.

Bishop. Well said, if toned as well and timed as well.
Who art thou? citizen or hind? what wantest?

Tyrrel. My lord! your presence; but before the king;
Where it may grow more placid at its leisure.
The morn is only streakt with red, my lord!
You beat her out and out: how prettily
You wear your stocking over head and ears!
Keep off the gorse and broom! they soon catch fire!

Bishop. The king shall hear of this: I recognise
Sir Walter Tyrrel.

Tyrrel. And Sir Walter Tyrrel
By the same token duly recognises
The Church's well-begotten son, well-fed,
Well-mounted, and all well, except well-spoken,
The spiritual lord of Winchester.

Bishop. Ay, by God's grace! pert losel!

Tyrrel. Prick along
Lord bishop! quicker! catch fresh air! we want it;
We have had foul enough till dinner-time.

Bishop. Varlet! I may chastise this insolence.

Tyrrel. I like those feathers: but there crows no
cock
Without an answer. Though the noisiest throat
Sings from the bellfrey of snug Winchester,
Yet he from Westminster hath stouter spurs.

Bishop. God's blood! were I no bishop...

Tyrrel. Then thy own
Were cooler.

Bishop. Whip that hound aside! O Christ!
The beast has paw'd my housings! What a day
For dirt!

Tyrrel. The scent lies well; pity no more
The housings; look, my lord! here trots the king!

Rufus. Which of you broke my palings down?

Bishop. God knows,
Most gracious sir

Rufus. No doubt he does; but you,
Bishop! could surely teach us what God knows.
Ride back and order some score handicrafts
To fix them in their places.

Bishop. The command
Of our most gracious king shall be obeyed.
(*Riding off.*) Malisons on the atheist! Who can tell
Where are my squires and other men! confused
Among the servitors of temporal lords!
I must e'en turn again and hail that brute.
Sir Walter! good Sir Walter! one half-word!

[*Tyrrel rides toward him.*

Sir Walter! may I task your courtesy
To find me any of my followers!

Tyrrel. Willingly.

Rufus. Stay with me; I want thee, Tyrrel!
What does the bishop boggle at?

Tyrrel. At nothing.
He seeks his people, to retrieve the damage.

Rufus. Where are the lords?

Tyrrel. Gone past your Grace, bare-headed,
And falling in the rear.

Rufus. Well, prick then on.

I care but little for the chase to-day,
Although the scent lies sweetly. To knock down
My paling is vexatious. We must see
Our great improvements in this forest; what
Of roads blockt up, of hamlets swept away,
Of lurking dens called cottages, and cells,
And hermitages. Tyrrel! thou didst right
And dutifully, to remove the house
Of thy forefathers. 'Twas an odd request,
To leave the dovecote, for the sake of those
Flea-bitten blind old pigeons. There it stands!
But, in God's name! what mean these hives? the bees
May sting my dogs.

Tyrrel. They hunt not in the summer.

Rufus. They may torment my fawns.

Tyrrel. Sir! not unless
Driven from their hives: they like the flowers much better.

Rufus. Flowers! and leave flowers too?

Tyrrel. Only some half-wild,
In tangled knots; balm, clary, marjoram.

Rufus. What lies beyond this close briar hedge, that smells
Through the thick dew upon it, pleasantly?

Tyrrel. A poor low cottage: the dry marl-pit
shields it,
And, frail and unsupported like itself,
Peace-breathing honeysuckles comfort it
In its misfortunes.

Rufus. I am fain to laugh
At thy rank minstrelsy. A poor low cottage!
Only a poor low cottage! where, I ween,
A poor low maiden blesses Walter Tyrrel.

Tyrrel. It may be so.

Rufus. No; it may not be so.
My orders were that all should be removed,
And, out of special favour, special trust
In thee, Sir Walter, I consigned the care
Into thy hands, of razing thy own house
And those about it; since thou hast another
Fairer and newer, and more lands around.

Tyrrel. Hall, chapel, chamber, cellar, turret,
grange,
Are level with the grass.

Rufus. What negligence
To leave the work then incomplete, when little
Was there remaining! Strip that roof, and start
Thy petty game from cover.

Tyrrel. O my liege!

Command not this!

Rufus. Make me no confidant
Of thy base loves.

Tyrrel. Nor you, my liege! nor any:
None such hath Walter Tyrrel.

Rufus. Thou 'rt at bay;
Thou hast forgotten thy avowal, man!

Tyrrel. My father's house is (like my father) gone:
But in that house, and from that father's heart
Mine grew into his likeness, and held thence
Its rich possessions..God forgive my boast!
He bade me help the needy, raise the low..

Rufus. And stand against thy king!

Tyrrel. How many yokes
Of oxen, from how many villages
For miles around, brought I, at my own charge,
To bear away the rafters and the beams
That were above my cradle at my birth,
And rang when I was christened, to the carouse
Of that glad father and his loyal friends!

Rufus. He kept good cheer, they tell me.

Tyrrel. Yonder thatch
Covers the worn-out woman at whose breast
I hung, an infant.

Rufus. Ay! and none beside?

Tyrrel. Four sons have fallen in the wars.

Rufus. Brave dogs!

Tyrrel. She hath none left.

Rufus. No daughter?

Tyrrel. One.

Rufus. I thought it.
Unkennel her.

Tyrrel. Grace! pity! mercy on her!

Rufus. I will not have hot scents about my chase.

Tyrrel. A virtuous daughter of a virtuous mother
Deservès not this, my liege!

Rufus. Am I to learn
What any subject at my hand deserves?

Tyrrel. Happy, who dares to teach it and who can!

Rufus. And thou, forsooth!

Tyrrel. I have done my duty, sire!

Rufus. Not half: perform the rest, or bide my wrath.

Tyrrel. What, break athwart my knee the staff of age!

Rufus. Question me, villain!

Tyrrel. Villain I am none.

Rufus. Retort my words! By all the saints! thou diest,
False traitor

Tyrrel. Sire! no private wrong, no word
Spoken in angriness, no threat against
My life or honour, urge me..

Rufus. Urge to what?
Dismountest?

Tyrrel. On my knees, as best beseems,
I ask..not pardon, sire! but spare, oh spare
The child devoted, the deserted mother!

Rufus. Take her; take both.

Tyrrel. She loves her home; her limbs
Fail her; her husband sleeps in that churchyard;
Her youngest child, born many years the lást,
Lies (not half-length) along the father's coffin.
Such separate love grows stronger in the stem
(I have heard say) than others close together,
And that, where pass these funerals, all life's spring
Vanishes from behind them, all the fruits
Of riper age are shrivelled, every sheaf
Husky; no gleaning left. She would die here,
Where from her bed she looks on his, no more
Able to rise, poor little soul! than he.

Rufus. Who would disturb them, child or father? where
Is the churchyard thou speakest of?

Tyrrel. Among
Yon nettles: we have levelled all the graves.

Rufus. Right: or our horses might have stumbled on them.

Tyrrel. Your grace oft spares the guilty; spare the innocent!

Rufus. Up from the dew! thy voice is hoarse already.

Tyrrel. Yet God hath heard it. It entreats again,
Once more, once only; spare this wretched house.

Rufus. No, nor thee neither.

Tyrrel. Speed me, God! and judge
O thou! between the oppressor and opprest!

[*He pierces Rufus with an arrow.*

THE PARENTS OF LUTHER.

John Luther. I left thee, Margaretta, fast asleep,
Thou, who wert always earlier than myself,
Yet hast no mine to trudge to, hast no wedge
To sharpen at the forge, no pickaxe loose
In handle.
Come, blush not again: thy cheeks
May now shake off those blossoms which they bore
So thick this morning, that last night's avowal
Nestles among them stil.
So, in few months
A noisier bird partakes our whispering bower.
Say it again.
Margaretta. And, in my dream, I blushed!
John. Idler! wert dreaming too? and after dawn?

Marg. In truth was I.

John. Of me?

Marg. No, not of you.

John. No matter; for methinks some Seraph's wing
Fann'd that bright countenance.

Marg. Methinks it did,
And stir'd my soul within.

How could you go
And never say good-bye, and give no kiss?

John. It might have waken'd thee. I can give more
Kisses than sleep: so thinking, I heav'd up
Slowly my elbow from above the pillow,
And, when I saw it woke thee not, went forth.

Marg. I would have been awaken'd for a kiss,
And a good-bye, or either, if not both.

John. Thy dreams were not worth much then.

Marg. Few dreams are;
But .....

John. By my troth! I will intrench upon
The woman's dowry, and will contradict,
Tho' I should never contradict again.
I have got more from dreams a hundred-fold
Than all the solid earth, than field, than town

Than (the close niggard purse that cramps my fist)
The mine will ever bring me.

Marg. So have I,
And so shall each indeed, if this be true.

John. What was it then? for when good dreams befall
The true of heart, 'tis likely they come true..
A vein of gold? ay? silver? copper? iron?
Lead? sulphur? alum? alabaster? coal?
Shake not those ringlets nor let down those eyes,
Tho' they look prettier for it, but speak out.
True, these are not thy dainties.

Marg. Guess again.

John. Crystalline kitchens, amber-basted spits
Whizzing with frothy savory salamanders,
And swans that might, so plump and pleasant-looking,
Swim in the water from the mouths of knights;
And ostrich-eggs off coral woods (the nests
Outside of cinnamon, inside of saffron,
And mortar'd well, for safety-sake, with myrrh,)
Serv'd up in fern leaves green before the Flood?

Marg. Stuff! you will never guess it, I am sure.

John. No? and yet these are well worth dreaming of.

Marg. Try once again.

John. Faith! it is kind to let me.
Under-ground beer-cascades from Nuremberg?
Rhine vintage stealing from Electoral cellars,
And, broader than sea-baths for mermaid brides,
With fluits upon the surface strides across,
Pink conchs, to catch it, and to light it down;
And music from basaltic organ-pipes
For dancing; and five fairies to one man.

Marg. Oh his wild fancies!...Are they innocent?

John. I think I must be near it by that shrug.
Spicy sack-posset, roaring from hot springs
And running off like mad thro' candied cliffs,
But catching now and then some fruit that drops......
Shake thy head yet? why then thou hast the palsy.
Zooks! I have thought of all things probable
And come to my wit's end.
What canst thou mean?

Marg. Nay, I have half a mind now not to tell.

John. Then it is out...Thy whole one ill could hold it.
A woman's mind hates pitch upon its seams.

Marg. Hush! one word more! and then my lips are closed

John. Pish! one more word! and then my lips...

Marg. O rare

Impudent man!...and such discourse from you!
I dreamt we had a boy...

John. A wench, a wench....
A boy were not like thee.

Marg. I said a boy.

John. Well, let us have him, if we miss the girl.

Marg My father told me he *must* have a boy,
And call him Martin (his own name) because
Saint Martin both was brave and cloth'd the poor.

John. Hurrah then for Saint Martin! he shall have
Enough to work on in this house of ours.

Marg. Now do not laugh, dear husband! but this dream
Seem'd somewhat more.

John. So do all dreams, ere past.

Marg. Well, but it seems so stil.

John. Aye, twist my fingers,
Basketing them to hold it.

Marg. Never grave!

John. I shall be.

Marg. That one thought should make you now.

John. And that one tap upon the cheek to boot.

Marg. I do believe, if you were call'd to Heaven
You would stay toying here.

John. I doubt I should.
Methinks I set my back against the gate,
Thrown open to me by this rosy hand,
And look both ways, but see more heaven than earth :
Give me thy dream · thou puttest it aside :
I must be feasted : fetch it forth at once.

Marg. Husband! I dreamt the child was in my arms,
And held a sword, which from its little grasp
I could not move, nor you : I dreamt that proud
But tottering shapes, in purple filagee,
Pull'd at it, and he laught.

John. They frighten'd thee!

Marg. Frighten'd me! no : the infant's strength prevail'd.
Devils, with angel s faces, throng'd about ;
Some offer'd flowers, and some held cups behind,
And some held daggers under silken stoles.

John. These frighten'd thee, however.

Marg. He knew all ;
I knew he did.

John. A dream! a dream indeed!
He knew and laught!

Marg. He sought his mother's breast,
And lookt at them no longer.

All the room
Was fill'd with light and gladness.

John. He shall be
Richer than we are; he shall mount his horse . .
A feat above his father; and be one
Of the duke's spearmen.

Marg. God forbid! they lead
Unrighteous lives, and often fall untimely.

John. A lion-hearted lad shall Martin be.

Marg. God willing; if *his* servant; but not else.
I have such hopes, full hopes, hopes overflowing.

John. A grave grand man, half collar and half cross,
With chain enough to hold our mastiff by,
Thou fain would'st have him. Out of dirt so stiff,
Old Satan fashioneth his idol, Pride.

Marg. If proud and cruel to the weak, and bent
To turn all blessings from their even course
To his own kind and company, may he
Never be great, with collar, cross, and chain;
No, nor be ever angel, if, O God!
He be a fallen angel at the last.

(*After a pause.*)

Uncle, you know, is sacristan; and uncle
Had once an uncle who was parish priest.

John. He was the man who sung so merrily
Those verses which few scholars understand,
Yet which they cannot hide away, nor drive
The man from memory after forty years.

Marg. (sings) *Our brightest pleasures are reflected pleasures.*
And they shine sweetest from the cottage-wall.

John. The very same.

Marg. We understand them, John!

John. An inkling. But your uncle sacristan
Hath neither sword nor spur.

Marg. It was a sword,
A flaming sword, but innocent, I saw;
And I have seen in pictures such as that,
And in the hands of angels borne on clouds
He may defend our faith, drive out the Turk,
And quench the crescent in the Danaw stream.

John. Thou, who begannest softly, singest now
Shrill as a throstle.

Marg. Have we then no cause
To sing as throstles after sign thus strange?

John. Because it was so strange, must we believe
The rather?

Marg. Yes; no fire was in the house,
No splinter, not a spark: the virgin's chin

Shone not with rushlight under it; 'twas out,
For night was almost over, if not past,
And the Count's chapel has not half that blaze
On the Count's birth-day, nor the ball at night.
Ah surely, surely fare like our's sends up
No idle fumes; nor wish nor hope of mine
Fashion'd so bright a substance to a form
So beautiful .... There must be truth in it.

John. There shall be then. Your uncle's sacristy
Shall hold the armour quite invisible,
Until our little Martin some fine day
Bursts the door open, spurr'd, caparison'd,
Dukes lead his bridle, princes tramp behind.
He may be pope .... who knows?

Marg. Are you in earnest?
But if he should be pope, will he love *us*?
Or let us (O yes sure he would!) love *him*?
Nor slink away, ashamed? Pope, no; not pope,
But bishop (ay?) he may be? There are few
Powerfuller folks than uncle Grimmermann.
Promise he scarce would give us, but a wink
Of hope he gave, to make a chorister.

John. *If thou wilt find materials,* were his words.

Marg. I did not mark the words; they were too light:

And yet he never breaks his troth.

John. Not he:

No, he would rather break his fast ten times.

Do not look seriously....when church allows,

I mean; no more; six days a week; not seven.

I *have* seen houses where the Friday cheese

Was not (in *my* mind) cut with Thursday knife.

Marg. O now for shame! such houses cannot stand.

Pr'ythee talk reason.... As the furnace-mouth

Shows only fire, so your's shows laughter only.

Choristers have been friars ..our's may be....

And then a father abbot.

John. At one leap,

As salmon up Schaffhausen.

Marg. Just the same....

Then....

John. Ring the bells! Martin is pope, by Jove!

THE DEATH OF CLYTEMNESTRA.

ORESTES AND ELECTRA.

Electra. Pass on, my brother! she awaits the
wretch,
Dishonorer, despoiler, murderer....
None other name shall name him....she awaits
As would a lover..
Heavenly Gods! what poison
O'erflows my lips!
Adultress! husband-slayer!
Strike her, the tigress!
Think upon our father..
Give the sword scope .. think what a man was he,
How fond of her! how kind to all about,
That he might gladden and teach *us* .. how proud
Of thee, Orestes! tossing thee above
His joyous head and calling thee his crown.
Ah! boys remember not what melts our hearts

And marks them evermore !

Bite not thy lip,

Nor tramp as an unsteddy colt the ground,
Nor stare against the wall, but think again
How better than all fathers was our father.
Go ..

Orestes. Loose me, then! for this white hand, Electra,
Hath fastened upon mine with fiercer grasp
Than mine can grasp the sword.

Electra. Go, sweet Orestes!
I knew not I was holding thee .. Avenge him !
(*Alone.*) How he sprang from me!

.. Sure, he now has reacht
The room before the bath ..

The bath-door creeks!

.. It hath creakt thus since he .. since thou, O father!
Ever since thou didst loosen its strong valves,
Either with all thy dying weight, or strength
Agonized with her stabs ..

What plunge was that ?

Ah me!

.. What groans are those?

Orestes (*returning*) They sound through hell

Rejoicing the Eumenides.*

She slew

Our father; she made thee the scorn of slaves;
Me (son of him who ruled this land and more)
She made an outcast . . .

Would I had been so

For ever! ere such vengeance....

Electra. O that Zeus

Had let thy arm fall sooner at thy side
Without those drops! list! they are audible . .
For they are many . . from the sword's point falling,
And down from the mid blade!

Too rash Orestes!

Couldst thou not then have spared our wretched mother?

* An ancient scholiast has recorded that the name of Eumenides was given to these Goddesses after the expiation of Orestes. But Catullus (called the *learned* by his countrymen) represents Ariadne invoking them by this appellation long before the Trojan war. The verses are the most majestic in the Roman language.

Eumenides! quarum anguineis redimita capillis
Frons expirantes præportat pectoris iras,
Huc, huc adventate! &c.

Orestes. The Gods could not.

Electra. She was not theirs, Orestes!

Orestes. And didst not thou ...

Electra. 'Twas I, 'twas I, who did it;
Of our unhappiest house the most unhappy!
Under this roof, by every God accurst,
There is no grief, there is no guilt, but mine.

Orestes. Electra! no!
'Tis now my time to suffer . .
Mine be, with all its pangs, the righteous deed.

THE MADNESS OF ORESTES.

ORESTES AND ELECTRA.

Orestes. Heavy and murderous dreams, O my Electra,
Have dragged me from myself.
Is this Mycenai?
Are we ...... are all who should be ...... in our house?
Living? unhurt? our father here? our mother?
Why, that deep gasp? for 'twas not sigh nor groan.
She then ...... 'twas she who fell! when? how? beware!
No, no, speak out at once, that my full heart
May meet it, and may share with thee in all ..
In all... but that one thing.
It was a dream.
We may share all.
They live: both live:
O say it!

Electra. The Gods have placed them from us, and there rolls
Between us that dark river.....

Orestes. Blood! blood! blood!

I see it roll; I see the hand above it,
Imploring; I see *her*.
Hiss me not back
Ye snake-hair'd maids! I will look on; I will
Hear the words gurgle thro' that cursed stream,
And catch that hand .. that hand .. which slew my father!
It cannot be .... how could it slay my father?
Death to the slave who spoke it! .... slay my father!
It tost me up to him to earn a smile,
And was a smile then such a precious boon,
And royal state and proud affection nothing?
Ay, and thee too, Electra, she once taught
To take the sceptre from him at the door ..
Not the bath-door, not the bath-door, mind that! ..
And place it in the veste, against
The spear of Pallas, where it used to stand.
Where is it now? methinks I missed it there.
How we have trembled to be seen to move it!
Both looking up, lest that stern face should frown,
Which always gazed on Zeus right opposite.
Oh! could but one tear more fall from my eyes,
It would shake off those horrid visages,
And melt them into air.
I am not your's,

Fell Goddesses! A just and generous Power,
A bright-hair'd God, directed me.
And thus
Abased is he whom such a God inspired!
(After a pause.)
Into whose kingdom went they? did they go
Together?
Electra. Oh! they were not long apart.
Orestes. I know why thou art pale; I know whose head
Thy flowerlike hands have garlanded; I know
For whom thou hast unbraided all thy love.
He well deserves it......he shall have it all.
Glory and love shall crown thee, my brave sister!
Electra. I am not she of Sparta. Let me live
(If live I must, Orestes!) not unnamed
Nor named too often. Speak no more of love,
Ill-open'd and opprobrious in this house..
A mother should have had, a father had it,
O may a brother let it dwell with him,
Unchangeable, unquestioned, solitary,
Strengthened and hallowed in the depths of grief!
Gaze not so angrily.. I dare not see thee,
I dare not look where comfort should be found.
Orestes. I dare and do behold them all day long,
And, were that face away so like my mother's,



I would advance and question and compell them . .
They hear me, and they know it

Electra Hear me too,
Ye mighty ones! to me invisible!
And spare him! spare him! for without the Gods
He wrought not what he wrought: And are not ye
Partakers of their counsels and their power?
O spare the son of him whom ye and they
Sent against Ilion, to perform your will
And bid the rulers of the earth be just.

Orestes. And dare they frighten thee too? frighten thee!
And bend thee into prayer?
Off, hateful eyes!
Look upon me, not her.
Ay, thus, 'tis well.
Cheer, cheer thee, my Electra!
I am strong,
Stronger than ever. . . steel, fire, adamant . .
But cannot bear thy brow upon my neck,
Cannot bear these wild writhings, these loud sobs,
By all the Gods! I think thou art half-mad......
I must away......follow me not......stand there!

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